

EPISCOPAL DIVINITY SCHOOL

*Thesis/Project*

**RE-MAPPING THE MARGINS: THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS  
ON CHINESE AMERICAN EXPERIENCES IN THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH**

BY

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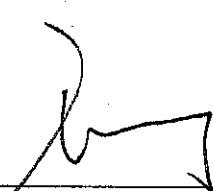
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This thesis gathers the experiences of a small number of Chinese Americans who, like myself, came to be members of Episcopal congregations that were largely non-Chinese. It makes no claim to be a comprehensive or authoritative “study” of all Chinese Americans in the Episcopal Church. I call the six people who shared their voices Dialog Partners rather than “research subjects.” The Dialog Partners’ voices and my own are put in conversation with literature selected from Asian American history and sociology (including the sociology of Chinese American religion); theology and biblical criticism by Chinese and Asian Americans; and congregational revitalization. Via e-mail the Dialog Partners described their immigrant experiences (or that of their family of origin); their reasons for joining the Episcopal Church; their ministries as Christians, both within and outside the church; their experiences of racism and prejudice; and their understandings of faith. The thesis begins with a look at Scripture, using the theme of diaspora, which I argue is the governing narrative paradigm of Scripture and human history, to place Chinese American historical experience in the context of our sacred narrative. A brief presentation of the historical development of how Chinese people have been perceived in the United States focuses on the trope of “the Asian as perpetual foreigner,” and argues that acts of institutional racism underlie persisting patterns of seeing Asians as more intractably foreign than other immigrant groups. A discussion of works by selected Asian American theologians focuses on the trope of “the Asian as model minority,” and such themes as marginality, transnationality, liminality, and imagination. Finally, I present the Dialog Partners’ accounts of their ministries through

the lenses of these concepts from congregational studies: (1) the missional church; (2) baptismal ministry and vocation; and (3) understanding the church as a learning community. The Dialog Partners, in my view, express a self-understanding of their motivations to ministry that implicitly resonates with these characteristics of congregational vitality. Their work and ministry embody a sense of church that calls us to realize what Verna Dozier and some of those writing on the missional church call “the dream of God.”

## Dedication

In memory of my parents —

曹  
應  
如

Ellen Tsao Eoyang  
(*Ts'ao Ying-ju*)

&

Thomas Tsao Eoyang  
(*Ouyang Chüeh-ch'ing*)

歐  
陽  
覺  
青

*You went into diaspora  
so we could find home.*

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## **PREFACE**

When I was invited to apply for the Doctor of Ministry program at Episcopal Divinity School (EDS), and in particular that part of the program jointly sponsored by EDS and Episcopal Asiamerica Ministries (EAM), I wondered what I could propose as a thesis project that would serve the goals of the funding institutions. I have not worked in ethnic Chinese ministry, and made it clear to the bishop overseeing the first few years of my priestly ministry that my linguistic capabilities did not equip me to pursue such a path, my ethnic heritage notwithstanding.

It then came to me that I might find a small number of Chinese Americans, like myself, who came to be members of Episcopal congregations that were predominantly non-Chinese. What might our experiences look like if we gathered them and compared them? What might it say about the Episcopal Church's explicit value of being "welcoming to all"? How might my work on and commitments to antiracism in the church be deepened and challenged by what I would find out from speaking to other Chinese Americans, and exploring related literature from liberation theology, Asian American studies, and congregational renewal?

An oddly upbeat if not congratulatory historical account of the Episcopal Church's ministry to immigrants was recently published. It concludes: "The Episcopal Church is staying true to its Anglican heritage of being a church for all people, though it

still has a way to go in meeting that goal.”<sup>1</sup> Despite the many appalling historical failures and current challenges frankly presented, David Danner, the author, manages to begin and end on a resoundingly positive note. (The collaboration between Episcopal Asiamerica Ministries and Episcopal Divinity School on a Doctor of Ministry program, of which this thesis is an early product, is one of his reasons for cheer.) One wonders about the source of the Danner’s optimism when one of the first pieces of solid information he presents is racial demographic data for the Episcopal Church compared to the US population. I have presented his data in table form for ease of understanding:<sup>2</sup>

	<b>Episcopal Church</b>	<b>United States</b>
White	92%	70%
Black	4%	11%
Latino	2%	12%
Asian	1%	3%
Other/mixed	1%	3%

It is not clear, having presented these statistics, how the author can assert towards the end of the article, “the diversity which is visibly noticeable in many of the church’s national and diocesan gatherings, and sometimes less so on the parish level, reflects the growing diversity of the twenty-first century United States.”<sup>3</sup> Danner makes clear that for much of its history, when the Episcopal Church reached out to immigrants coming to the United States, it found approaching northern European people (including, of course, people from the British Isles) more congenial than evangelizing people from southern and

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<sup>1</sup> David L. Danner, “Immigration and the Episcopal Church: An Ever-Changing Face,” *Anglican Theological Review* 95, no. 4 (Fall 2013): 671.

<sup>2</sup> Data from David L. Danner, “Immigration and the Episcopal Church,” 650, cited from “Report of the Standing Committee on the Mission and Evangelism of the Episcopal Church,” *Report to the 77th General Convention, Otherwise Known as The Blue Book* (New York: Office of the General Convention of the Episcopal Church, 2012), 500.

<sup>3</sup> Danner, “Immigration and the Episcopal Church,” 671.

eastern Europe, or, later, people from Asia. He does, however, cite positively the work of EAM. It should be noted that the outreach, evangelization, and mission to immigrants that Danner describes is always for *groups* of immigrants, and for the gathering of immigrant groups in congregations of their own, often housed in the same building as a predominantly Anglo congregation, but meeting at different service times. His noting that the visible diversity in the Episcopal Church is “sometimes less . . . on the parish level” might strike a person of color as an amazingly calm understatement.

My stance on the Episcopal Church’s performance in achieving a necessary diversity is considerably less celebratory and more hortatory than Danner’s. While I did not have the space to argue this at length in the thesis itself, I hope that the Episcopal Church will renew its commitment to the work of antiracism, and take that work—at long last—beyond the level of mere training, as if two or three days spent learning about racism can do anything more than scratch the surface, or can signify to clergy anything more than a canonical ticket that must be punched. As the book of Hebrews says about the word of God (Heb. 4:12), the work of antiracism is living and active. Our trainings should be just the first step for making the church—at parish, diocesan, and church-wide levels—into an actively antiracist community dedicated not just to prophetic speaking and preaching, but also to identifying and dismantling the actual systems of racism that continue to oppress people of color in the United States.

Though I see the work of forming ethnic congregations wherever appropriate as important, I also see that having such congregations encourages the church to consider racial and ethnic segregation in the church to be a benign norm. It smacks of the

“missionary,” as opposed to “missional” paradigm, a distinction I explore in chapter 5. Absent an understanding of how to be in fuller relationship with the “other” on a personal and congregational level, the church’s vocation to be truly reconciling will never be seriously pursued. Racially homogeneous congregations can hardly claim to be the “contrast community” that calls its surrounding community to realize the “dream of God.” We will continue to congratulate ourselves on how well we have done, when the actual facts on the ground clearly show otherwise.

As a parish priest in the Episcopal Church, I am also, naturally, writing out of a widely shared anxiety about the state of the mainline Protestant church in general, and the Episcopal Church in particular. Some who trace the history of twentieth and twenty-first century Christianity will date the beginning of the Christendom’s decline to Darwin, the scientific revolution, and Victorian skepticism; others to the European Enlightenment of the eighteenth century; or even with the Protestant Reformation.<sup>4</sup> Persistently, we hear theological, historical, and congregational perspectives on the death of Christendom.<sup>5</sup> We read, almost weekly, not only about mainline decline and “the rise of the nones,”<sup>6</sup> but

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<sup>4</sup> Ronald K. Rittgers, “Blame it on Luther,” review of *The Unintended Reformation: How a Religious Revolution Secularized Society*, by Brad S. Gregory, *Christian Century*, January 23, 2013, 26-29.

<sup>5</sup> Harvey Cox, *The Future of Faith* (New York: HarperCollins, 2009); Diana Butler Bass, *Christianity After Religion: The End of Church and the Birth of a New Spiritual Awakening* (New York: HarperCollins, 2012); Phyllis Tickle, *The Great Emergence: How Christianity is Changing and Why* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2008), and Tickle, *The Age of the Spirit: How the Ghost of an Ancient Controversy Is Shaping the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2014).

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Kimberly Winston, “The Rise of the ‘Nones,’” *Christian Century*, October 31, 2012, 14.

also about the “disintegration” of what has hitherto been the numerically more visible face of American Christianity.<sup>7</sup>

The Episcopal Church has certainly not escaped this narrative of numerical decline—both because of the trends described by those who point to mega-historical shifts in Western culture (e.g., Phyllis Tickle<sup>8</sup>) but, closer to home, the no-doubt deleterious effects of the Episcopal Church’s internal struggles over human sexuality, and, further back than that, over the ordination of women. There is also the conservative analysis that places the blame on “the hierarchy’s wholesale acceptance of liberal theology.” The figures for 2012 indicate that the Episcopal Church had 2,066,710 baptized members in its dioceses in the United States and abroad, down from 2,096,389 members in 2011—a decline of 1.4%.<sup>9</sup>

Not just the creeping secularity of Western culture in the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, then, but a world whose populations have grown increasingly interspersed (see the discussion of diaspora in chapter 1), might well lead us to question the purpose and efficacy of Christian churches today. The notion that my Chinese immigrant mother had in the 1950s, soon after the family’s arrival in the United States, which was to join a church of a mainline Christian denomination, adopting the

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<sup>7</sup> John S. Dickerson, “The Decline of Evangelical America,” *New York Times*, December 16, 2012, Sunday Review. The article’s byline states that Dickerson is the author of *The Great Evangelical Recession: Six Factors That Will Crash the American Church...and How to Prepare*.

<sup>8</sup> See Tickle, *The Great Emergence*, and Tickle, *The Age of the Spirit*.

<sup>9</sup> Michael Gryboski, “Episcopal Church Continues Downward Trend, According to Report,” *Christian Post*, November 1, 2013, <http://www.christianpost.com/news/episcopal-church-continues-downward-trend-according-to-report-107906/>. The quotation concerning the conservative analysis comes from Jeff Walton, Anglican program director at the Institute on Religion and Democracy, speaking to the reporter from *Christian Post*. I assume, despite the conservative bias of this particular source, that the numbers provided are vaguely accurate.

“indigenous” faith tradition the better to acculturate her children into American society, now seems almost quaint.

My motivation in writing this thesis, then, stems not only from my curiosity about the faith journeys of other Chinese Americans in the Episcopal Church, but also, in no small part, from my anxiety about the church—its mission, its prophetic place in American society, its calling to be a reconciling force in an increasingly diverse society, and, of course, its financial and numerical health. It also stems from nagging questions of what I as a Chinese American hope to do in ordained ministry in an era where all assumptions about church seem up for negotiation. Whatever my criticisms of American society and the Episcopal Church, I hope that anyone who reads what I have written recognizes that I offer my reflections to the church with love as well as concern.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First, I am grateful to Episcopal Asiamerica Ministries (EAM) and its missioner, the Rev. Dr. Winfred B. Vergara for initiating a partnership with Episcopal Divinity School (EDS) to offer the opportunity for advanced education and reflection for Asian and Asian American leadership in the Episcopal Church. My participation in the Doctor of Ministry (D.Min.) program was partially funded by both EAM and EDS, and I thank both institutions for their generosity and support.

Next, to the Dialog Partners, I owe my humble and heartfelt thanks for their willingness to respond to my e-mails and questions, and for offering such thoughtful responses to extremely open-ended questions. I thank them also for giving me express permission to use the particular quotations I have chosen from their e-mails.

I am grateful to Dr. Jonathan Y. Tan, who was vigilant in his Facebook postings regarding the hubbub surrounding the publication of Amy Chua's second book, and drew my attention to the re-examination of the trope of the Asian American as model minority, and especially to the excellent historical work of Ellen D. Wu, which considerably deepened my understanding of the roots and ramifications of this important story of American racism.

In June, 2013, shortly after the EDS June intensive term, I was given some time during the gathering of the Chinese Convocation of the Episcopal Asiamerica Ministries (EAM) 40th Anniversary Consultation to present my D.Min. project and to solicit "dialog partners" to whom I could address questions via e-mail. Several people gave me their

names and e-mails, but my timing was such that I was only able to add one of the volunteers to the Dialog Partners group. Nevertheless, I thank the Rev. Ada Wong Nagata, convenor of the Chinese Convocation of EAM, for allowing me the time to present my project.

The Rev. Wong Nagata is also my colleague in the D.Min. program co-sponsored by EAM and Episcopal Divinity School. Together we are the first fruits of this partnership. I am deeply grateful for her friendship and support, so freely and quickly given. She is also responsible for the name that our entire D.Min. cohort gave ourselves: the Water Buffaloes. Ada and the other Water Buffaloes have bolstered my spirits with their good humor, laughter, groundedness, and faith, and so I thank them all, in addition to Ada: the Rt. Rev. Rosemary Ananis, the Rev. Diane Marie Datz, the Rev. Nancy Hauser, and the Rev. Moses ‘Kunle Sowale.

To the parishioners of Grace Epiphany Church who asked me how this was going and urged me to finish—I thank you for your prayers and encouragement.

To my friends who also encouraged me on this endeavor, especially to Dr. Neville Strumpf and to the Canon Jill Mathis who wrote letters of reference in support of my application to the D.Min. program—I thank you for your confidence in me, your unwavering support, and your affection.

The Rev. Dr. Patrick Cheng invited me to consider applying for the collaborative EAM-EDS D.Min. program as one of its first students. Despite the stress of working on this while being the full-time, sole rector of a struggling parish, I thank him for his



invitation, his confidence, his role modeling, and most of all his friendship. I am also grateful that he has agreed to be the second reader for this thesis.

To the entire faculty of Episcopal Divinity School I once again express my thanks for changing my life fourteen years ago as they patiently guided me (not exactly kicking and screaming, but almost) toward my calling as an Episcopal priest. To those with whom I studied during the D.Min. program I owe additional thanks for replenishing what stores of knowledge and insight I may need to guide me through the second half of my ordained ministry: the Rev. Dr. Joan M. Martin, who started us all off on the D.Min. program with verve, wit, and caring; the Rev. Dr. William Kondrath, for his kindness, wisdom, and confidence in me, and for engaging me with compassion around the real-life struggles of congregational leadership, and around my vocational quandaries; Dr. Kwok Pui-lan for her teaching, which is as pastoral as it is intellectually and spiritually challenging—she was the peerless guide to the field of liberation theologies; Dr. Gale A. Yee, who supervised a directed reading on Asian American studies, and engaged my written reflections with humor, insight, and personal openness; Dr. Fredrica Harris Thompsett, whose advocacy of baptismal vocation and ministry renewed my understanding of the challenge that must be accepted by all who hope to lead congregations into an uncharted future; and the Rev. Elizabeth Magill whose insights on evangelism were pointed, experiential, and funny, and whose ministry to the people of the streets inspires all who know her.

And finally, again, to Dr. Kwok Pui-lan who followed up on Patrick's invitation and urged me to sign up for the D.Min. program, and who is the major advisor for this

thesis. She has been my mentor and indispensable guide in all things vocational, theological, spiritual, and human. Her scholarship sets a standard I can never hope to meet, and her abilities as a teacher and a pastor are those I try to emulate.

## INTRODUCTION

This is not a “study” of Chinese Americans in the Episcopal Church, appearances to the contrary. I am not an ethnographer, a sociologist, or an anthropologist, and so am not qualified to gather or present the information gained from my correspondents through those lenses. I therefore call them Dialog Partners rather than “research subjects.”<sup>1</sup> Such a small number of people can hardly be called a “statistical sample;” we are not even enough for two tables of *mah jong*. Nothing I say in these pages, then, may be construed as offering any generalizations about “Chinese Americans in the Episcopal Church.”

Instead, this essay will try to weave the Dialog Partners’ voices and my own with texts from Asian American studies, Chinese American theologians, and congregational revitalization, just to see where that contrapuntal conversation leads us. With our voices interwoven with other texts, we cannot be the basis for general characterizations, but at best a source for further questions. Because I wanted their voices to stand out, I have used a different font for block quotations of the Dialog Partners’ words. To protect their anonymity I have assigned them pseudonyms, and I have taken care not to link personal information—such as their specific ministries—with even their pseudonyms.

Beyond the purview of this thesis project, I also hope that the Dialog Partners and I can continue in relationship, both individually and communally. I hope to put us all in

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<sup>1</sup> As the *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, Fourth Edition (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000), offers both “dialogue” and “dialog” as alternative spellings, for brevity I have chosen the latter, strange though it may seem to some eyes. It also reflects the exclusively e-mail mode of my conversations with the Dialog Partners—the pop-up box on a computer screen that presents additional information or requests input is called a “dialog box,” not a “dialogue box.”

group communication so that we may continue to share informally our joys and challenges in being Chinese Americans in the Episcopal Church. This is not intended to supplant but to supplement the excellent work of Episcopal Asiamerica Ministries (EAM), especially for people who might never make it a priority to participate actively in such a formal group as EAM.

This work is by no means intended to replace, or even to offer a systematic updating of the Rev. Dr. Winfred B. Vergara's essential and necessarily broad survey of Asian Americans in the Episcopal Church.<sup>2</sup> Instead, I hope that by juxtaposing the Dialog Partners' reflections with my reading and with my own unfolding thoughts about church and ministry, I might offer some shards of insight useful to lay and ordained leaders who find Chinese Americans coming to their churches; to officers in the Episcopal Church at diocesan and church-wide levels who wish to know more about the Chinese American people in their midst; and to Chinese American and Asian American theologians to whom I make some pointed suggestions for future exploration. I hope that what insights are offered might be some useful scraps for a quilt, some apt tesserae for a mosaic, from the point of view of people who are sometimes the only one of their ethnicity in an entire congregation. That quilt or mosaic might describe a practical theology of reconciliation for the Episcopal Church. Where "mainstreaming" is Dr. Vergara's primary image of racial reconciliation within the Episcopal Church, I have chosen to explore the tensions of being persistently in diaspora, and to ask how any of us maps and re-maps his or her place in the margins. At a time when the American population is heading towards being a

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<sup>2</sup> Fred Vergara, *Mainstreaming: Asian Americans in the Episcopal Church* (New York: Office of Asian American Ministries, The Episcopal Church Center, 2005).

“majority-minority” society<sup>3</sup>—in other words a population where people of color will outnumber white people of European descent—what is defined as “mainstream” and as “margin” will become increasingly complex. How the church prepares itself to negotiate this shift and participates in the re-mapping will be of vital importance.

I write as a Chinese American parish priest in the Episcopal Church, who has never served or been part of a Chinese ethnic congregation. I am American-born and educated, and what Chinese language and culture I learned as a child or in graduate school is more notional than substantive, though I retain some odd vestiges and the ability to retrieve what tidbits I may need at the moment.

One important aspect of my social location is not directly addressed in this thesis: my identity as a gay man. I briefly allude in Chapter 3 to the struggles in the Episcopal Church and the global Anglican Communion over issues of sexuality, and I follow with more than a little interest how these issues have become not only a critical controversy within Christianity, but a source of friction in international relations. I have chosen not to deal with this thorny issue in these pages for reasons of both length restrictions and focus. I encourage those who wish to explore further the intersections of Asian American and lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender (LGBT) identity issues to consult the excellent body of work being compiled by the Rev. Dr. Patrick S. Cheng.<sup>4</sup> Cheng succinctly outlines the multiple quandaries a gay Asian American Christian person may face:

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<sup>3</sup> Sam Roberts, “In a Generation, Minority May Be the U.S. Majority,” *New York Times*, August 13, 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/14/washington/14census.html>.

<sup>4</sup> Patrick S. Cheng, *Radical Love: An Introduction to Queer Theology* (New York: Seabury, 2011); Cheng, *From Sin to Amazing Grace: Discovering the Queer Christ* (New York: Seabury, 2012); and especially Cheng, *Rainbow Theology: Bridging Race, Sexuality, and Spirit* (New York: Seabury, 2013).

All too often, we are forced to separate our sexual, racial, and spiritual identities into separate compartments. For example, with respect to sexuality, it is difficult to be openly gay in many Asian American communities and/or faith communities, both of which can be highly homophobic. With respect to race, it is difficult to openly embrace one's Asian American heritage in many LGBT communities and/or faith communities, both of which can be highly racist. Finally, with respect to spirituality, it is difficult to be an "out" person of faith in many LGBT communities and/or Asian American communities, both of which can be very secular and have a deep bias against religion and spirituality.<sup>5</sup>

Though the cognate and interlocking dynamics of marginalization deriving from both Asian American heritage and LGBT identity are certainly worth exploring, I hope that it will not seem to be an act of evasion that I have not dealt with them in this thesis project.

To reflect upon the experience of Chinese American Episcopalians might seem to some to be an exercise in the craft of miniature.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, it is to shed light on a small minority (Episcopalians constitute 3% of all Chinese American Protestants) of a larger minority (fewer Chinese Americans, 31%, identify as Christian than identify as unaffiliated, 52%) of yet a larger and growing but still small American ethnic minority. The growth of Asian Americans in proportion to the American population justifies a plea that this study might have some significance: Asian Americans (of whom Chinese Americans are the largest group, with Filipinos second, Indians third, and Japanese sixth out of the six largest groups) "recently passed Hispanics as the largest group of new immigrants to the United States."<sup>7</sup> To argue further that attention should be paid, I will attempt to make the case in chapter 4 that the continuing rise of the People's Republic of China will draw every American's attention to Chinese immigrants and the Chinese-descended population in the United States.

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<sup>5</sup> Cheng, *Radical Love*, 60.

<sup>6</sup> A clergy friend, when I told him the general subject of this project, said simply, "Short thesis."

<sup>7</sup> Pew Research Center, *The Rise of Asian Americans*, updated edition April 4, 2013, <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/files/2013/04/Asian-Americans-new-full-report-04-2013.pdf>, 1.

Fortunately, the Dialog Partners did not question the rationale for this essay. I found them purely through some rudimentary networking. Two people, for example, are brother and sister, and are distantly related to me by marriage; of the two I have met only one in person. One person is a parishioner at a church where I served years ago. Another person somehow became a Facebook friend, and another was referred to me by a mutual friend. One person was solicited at the June, 2013, conference of the Episcopal Asiamerica Ministries held in Burlingame, California. I sent them via e-mail three panels of questions dealing with their immigrant experiences (or that of their family of origin); their reasons for joining the Episcopal Church; their ministries as Christians, both within and outside the church; their experiences of racism and prejudice; and their understandings of faith.

I begin in chapter 1 by setting the scriptural context with the theme of diaspora. As much of our formation as Christians comes from reading or hearing Scripture in church, I felt it necessary to lift up a theme that places the Chinese American historical experience in the context of our sacred narrative. Chapter 2 briefly presents the historical development of how Chinese people have been perceived in the United States, with particular attention to the trope of “the Asian as perpetual foreigner.” Chapter 3 turns to the Dialog Partners themselves, and their stories of immigration, of coming to the Episcopal Church, and of their lives of faith. Chapter 4 explores the work of selected Asian American theologians to hear their concerns, as compared to those of the Dialog Partners. Finally, chapter 5 focuses on the Dialog Partners and their ministries both inside

and outside the church, highlighting not so much on what their ministries are, but their understanding of why they do what they do.



## Chapter 1

### **Diaspora: The Biblical Narrative and Chinese American Correlations**

It is a guiding premise of this thesis that diaspora is a basic principle both of the Scriptural narrative and of human history. Diaspora—the residence of the alien “other” among the native “us,” or “our” expansionist, imperial appropriation of the space of “others”: I will argue that this narrative of human movement is a persistent rhythm in both Scripture and history, and as such is relevant to how we understand the unfolding narrative of the Chinese American Christian experience.

#### *Diaspora and Promised Land as Competing Narrative Paradigms in Scripture*

Two narrative paradigms, I contend, run throughout Scripture, and they compete with each other: “diaspora” and “promised land.” A narrative paradigm is the set of assumptions and expectations we bring to stories, whether due to their genre or simply due to what we commonly take to be a natural or normative trajectory of human life. (The “happily-ever-after” wedding of romantic comedy is an example of a narrative paradigm.) The “promised land” narrative paradigm—and its corollary paradigm of restoration—are very much in the foreground of many of the Bible’s most familiar narratives. Though Abram/Abraham spends much of his portion of the Genesis narrative as a nomad, God promises him that where he has settled in the land of Canaan “I will give to you and your offspring forever” (Gen. 13:12-18). The story of the exodus from Egypt of the people of God, the wandering in the wilderness, and the coming to rest in the promised land of milk and honey is foundational to our reading of Scripture not only

because we hear it repeated in church and Sunday school, but because the voice of Scripture reminds us of it repeatedly after its original telling. On several occasions this reminder comes in the context of instructing the people to treat aliens as citizens—see, for example, Leviticus 19:33-34 and Deuteronomy 24:17.

Corollary to the narrative paradigm of “promised land” is the hope of restoration. The prophetic writings mostly take place with the Babylonian captivity as historical backdrop. The prophetic texts speaking into a dislocated world are frequently punctuated by oracles of restoration, the promise of the return of God’s favor to God’s exiled people, which is to be realized by the return and restoration of the people to the homeland, blessed by prosperity and peace. The sixtieth chapter of Isaiah is but one example among many of these oracles of promise and restoration. When we read Ezra-Nehemiah we are guided to understand the reported restoration and rebuilding of the Temple as happy developments for the restored people of Israel.

What the narrative paradigm of “promised land” forces the reader to expect—and how it governs what we take to be happy and unhappy outcomes to the various stories of Scripture—is that there is a single native geographical place for God’s chosen people. We read with the narrative hope that God’s people will reside unmolested in that place, or will be restored to that place from an unfortunate exile. Throughout the prophetic texts, prosperous settlement in the land or the restoration to it is the “happily-ever-after” ending. This paradigm persists deep into the Christian Testament, where the question the disciples ask Jesus just prior to his ascension is, “Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1:6). Preachers and other Christian believers have

constantly had to reinterpret what Jesus' messiahship means to the people of God within Scripture, and how it is related to Israel's/Jerusalem's restoration. We have had to discover the transpositions required (e.g., re-defining "Israel," "Jerusalem," and "the people of God") to make the "promised land" narrative paradigm more closely resemble the lived reality both of those within the story who seek restoration and of contemporary Christian readers who can see that it never really arrives.

Contrasting with the "promised land" narrative paradigm is that of diaspora. In the Hebrew Scriptures, despite the seemingly precise enumeration of clans, tribes, and nations throughout, neat separation in time and space is almost never achieved; people are always and at all times intermingled. Dichotomies of home and exile, of stasis and dispersion (diaspora), of native and foreign—while they seem to pervade the biblical text from the immediate post-Eden moment through the prophets and the book of Daniel, what we often neglect to see, because it is confronting us in plain sight at every point, is that the homogeneity of a people in a single place is almost never presented. After murdering Abel, Cain settles "in the land of Nod, east of Eden," where he takes a wife (Gen. 4:16). In other words, Cain is the first migrant, moving from one place where he is native to another place where he is the stranger. Indeed, the first fear that he expresses to God is that he will become a permanent "fugitive and a wanderer on the earth, and anyone who meets me may kill me" (Gen. 4:14).

In the narratives of Abraham, of Joseph, and of Moses and the Israelites in Egypt, the themes of migration, settling, and marginality abound. Abraham is told to leave his native place and settle in another that God has allotted to him; and yet only two

generations later his clan must emigrate to Egypt to survive. Coming back to the promised land seems to locate the people of God, finally, back in their homeland in the resolution of the Exodus story, but the language of Joshua and Judges does not permit us a simplistic understanding of the people of Israel secure in a defended land. A complete reading of Joshua will show that for the people of God possession of the land was not fulfilled at the battle of Jericho, as we might gather from a selective, “greatest stories” approach to biblical reading (in which the story stops “when the walls came tumblin’ down”); the entire text of this Deuteronomic history will not allow us to hear a claim of complete victory and uncontested occupation of the land:

-- Yet the Israelites did not drive out the Geshurites or the Maacathites; but Geshur and Maacath live within Israel to this day (Josh. 13.13).

-- But the people of Judah could not drive out the Jebusites, the inhabitants of Jerusalem; so the Jebusites live with the people of Judah in Jerusalem to this day (Josh. 15.63).

-- They did not, however, drive out the Canaanites who lived in Gezer; so the Canaanites have lived within Ephraim to this day but have been made to do forced labor (Josh. 16.10).

Of course the word “diaspora” is primarily associated with the exile of the political and cultural elite of Israel and Judah to Babylon following the conquest of Judah by that empire. This exile until the return and restoration decreed by Cyrus of Persia, the conqueror of the Babylonians, is reflected in late Isaiah, Nehemiah, Ezra, among other documents in the Hebrew Scriptures.

The joy expressed regarding the return and restoration would seem to be the narrative “happy ending” for the people of God, as the divinely engineered remedy for exile and diaspora. This remedy, however, is no more permanent than the coming of the

people into the promised land was clear-cut and settled. History and the books of Daniel and 1 and 2 Maccabees tell us that imperial subjugation resumed by Greek conquest under Alexander the Great and his successors. A short Maccabean period of independence was followed by the Roman imperial occupation that forms the background of the entire Christian Testament. Putting our reading of Scripture together with history, we are constantly aware of the context of the Roman Empire—overwhelmingly powerful, administratively sophisticated, economically exploitative, globally cosmopolitan, and, through its continuities with the Greek Empire, culturally pervasive.

In the Gospels, the regular encounters between Jesus and foreigners lead us to ask what we are being taught about God’s will in our encounters with the other. In the rest of the Christian Testament, the Pentecost event, Paul’s church planting and teaching, and the Book of Revelation can be read as pointing toward the eschatological resolution of the dichotomies of the self encountering the other in diaspora. The story of the powerful movement of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2 offers us a vivid scene of the world uniting in one place (Jerusalem) at one time, brought together to hear the same message spoken in all the tongues of the world: “Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem” (Acts 2:5). The birth of the church happens as diaspora is reconciled, and the burden of Babel has been lifted—at least in aspiration.<sup>1</sup>

If one reads Paul’s letters in historical context, one cannot avoid noticing that there has been a diaspora of Jews throughout the Greco-Roman world. Paul goes to teach in synagogues outside the boundaries of Palestine; he writes to or from churches formed

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<sup>1</sup> For a rich discussion of this point, see Eleazar S. Fernandez, “From Babel to Pentecost: Finding a Home in the Belly of the Empire,” *Semeia*, 90/91 (2002): 29-50. See also the discussion below.

in part out of the Jewish communities of Ephesus, Corinth, Philippi, and Rome itself.

How Jewish people came to be in those places is not narrated in the Bible stories we hear in Sunday school or in church, but the historical fact is evident in Paul's mission.

Diaspora continued; it was not a one-time event associated with the Babylonian captivity and reversed conclusively by the Persian restoration.

The apocalyptic vision in Revelation 7 shows us that the wished-for unity under God extends to the entire range of humanity: "After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands" (Rev. 7:9).<sup>2</sup> Reconciliation of people in diaspora is presented as a visible feature of God's kingdom.

#### *From Scripture to History*

Not only do the narratives of Scripture not permit us to witness a permanent state of settlement in the promised land; neither do the actual events of human history.

Whether because of nomadic social organization, environmental pressure (e.g., famine), war, empire and colonization, or simple adventure, peoples and populations have seldom seen fit to stay put, resting within their own settled boundaries, and letting their neighbors rest settled within theirs.

The colonization of North and South America by the nations of Europe, and the subsequent immigration into the various nations of the Western Hemisphere of peoples

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<sup>2</sup> Ironically, this passage was part of the Scripture reading the first time I was a lector for Sunday worship. The anecdote and others are recounted in the next chapter, where I refer to the assumed inability to read and speak English as a marker of foreignness in the trope of "the Asian as perpetual foreigner."

from the rest of the globe, simply constitute one of the most sustained and historically significant examples of the persistent habit of human perpetual motion. In the specific context of the United States, each narrative has its own particularity, of course—white European voyages of “discovery” are not the same story as the brutally organized depredations of the African slave trade, and neither one resembles the economically driven, somewhat autonomous influx (compared to the slave trade) into US territory of Asians in general and Chinese in particular. But the overall dynamic cannot be denied: in history as in Scripture, whether by coercion or by self-motivation, people have always left “home” to settle somewhere else. Diaspora, and not settlement in the promised land, is predominant rule of history, as it is the pervasive pattern in the Scriptural narrative.

What Scripture does teach us to see in history is the nexus between diaspora and empire. Whether the empire is Assyrian, Babylonian, Persian, Greek, or Roman, the biblical people of God are, for most of the story, living in subordination to empire. In history, we are able to observe that the diaspora/migration are also dislocations of empire, often stemming from a search for security and economic opportunity; diaspora can promote skills transfer towards the imperial center and then back outward, as well as military, political, economic, and cultural dispersion toward colonial periphery.<sup>3</sup>

To appropriate the language from Joshua, “to this day” we have lived interspersed with one another. Either “we” are living in diaspora among “others,” or “others” are

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<sup>3</sup> “The multiple A/PI [Asian/Pacific Islander] diasporas of the past two centuries owe much of their complex existence, directly or indirectly, to imperial economic and/or politically interventionist policies of Western nations. There have long been legal and illegal contract workers—a lure for some, a dire necessity for others—such as Chinese railroaders of the American west, Filipinos in the US military, medical establishment, and domestic work corps; Koreans and most other groups on the Hawaiian plantations; and, more recently, South Asians in high-tech industries.” Rachel A. R. Bundang, “Home as Memory, Metaphor, and Promise in Asian/Pacific American Religious Experience,” *Semeia* 90/91 (2002): 94.

living in diaspora among “us,” often as a result of imperial occupation; or we are invited to envision ourselves in the eschaton joyously gathered together in all our diversity.

Challenging the foreground narrative paradigm of Scripture—that of the “promised land”—and recognizing that diaspora is the rule rather than the exception (both in Scripture and in history) should complicate how we take the Scriptural narrative and apply it to our lived reality. If God’s intention has not, and has never been, to usher the people into the promised land, but rather to keep us living cheek-by-jowl with one another in an ever-increasingly globalized world, then we must begin to imagine beyond our received narrative paradigms what the peaceful, just, and reconciled diasporic world should look like. Ultimately our faith, of whatever tradition, should actively call us to recognize that there is no reality to “us” and “them;” a theological sociology, an understanding of human community as seen from the perspective of God, strongly suggests that, despite our many differences, there is only one interdependent “we.” It should come as no surprise, then, that Asian American theologians and biblical scholars have mined the theme of diaspora, often with illuminating results.

#### *Asian American Applications of the Diaspora Paradigm to Scripture*

Russell Moy attempts to correlate 1 Peter with the experience of Chinese Protestants in nineteenth-century San Francisco, by pointing out that both the community being addressed in the epistle and the Chinese Protestants were *paroikoi*, or “resident aliens.” This gives Moy the opportunity to recount the important history of the formation of the *Youxue Zhengdaohui* (“Young Men’s Christian Associations,” which Moy reminds us not to confuse with the better known YMCA) as a coping mechanism for the Chinese



Christians to adapt the ecclesiology imposed on them by white missionaries into social structures that would better meet their needs as marginalized immigrants.<sup>4</sup>

Unfortunately, the correlations to 1 Peter begin and end with the shared identity of the Chinese Christians and the Jewish/Christian community in Asia Minor as *paroikoi*. Moy does not substantially engage the actual text of the epistle. If he had, he might have offered us valuable interpretive insight into the relevance of the epistle's message of accommodation (exemplified in the emphasis on the household codes so frequently expounded in the pseudo-Pauline and other epistles) to the coping strategies used by early Chinese American Christians. He might have shed some light on the earliest Chinese Christian attempts to attain some measure of communal balance and stability in a racially hostile environment; how those efforts correspond to the accommodation urged by 1 Peter; and how 1 Peter's accommodation itself might relate to the later controversy over the trope of "the Asian as model minority," which will be further discussed in chapter 4.

By contrast biblical scholar Gale A. Yee, writing as a third-generation Chinese American, fully engages the story of Ruth and reads the book through the lens of her personal experience as a Chinese American and her immersion in the literature of Asian American studies.<sup>5</sup> She sees in Ruth the immigrant who is both "the model minority" and "the perpetual foreigner." Her analysis points out the parallels between the exploitation of Ruth's body in agricultural and procreative labor and the exploitation of Chinese

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<sup>4</sup> Russell G. Moy, "Resident Aliens of the Diaspora: 1 Peter and Chinese Protestants in San Francisco." *Semeia* 90/91 (2002): 51-67.

<sup>5</sup> Gale A. Yee, "'She Stood in Tears Amid the Alien Corn': Ruth, the Perpetual Foreigner and Model Minority," in *Off the Menu: Asian and Asian North American Women's Religion & Theology*, ed. Rita Nakashima Brock, Jung Ha Kim, Kwok Pui-lan, and Seung Ai Yang (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2007), 45-65.

immigrants who contributed materially to the building of the United States, while being legislatively alienated—“the perpetual foreigner”—and then later stereotyped as “good” (i.e., hard-working, uncomplaining, non-militant) people of color—“the model minority.” In her choice of title taken from one of Keats’s famous poems, Yee reminds us that Ruth—while admired by the reader for her loyalty to and love for Naomi—may, as an immigrant in diaspora, have a “sad heart . . . when, sick for home,/She stood in tears amid the alien corn” (John Keats, “Ode to a Nightingale,” Stanza 7).

Eleazar S. Fernandez also engages the biblical texts imaginatively and provocatively when he offers us Babel and Pentecost as alternative responses to diaspora in empire. He asserts that the Babel story “has nothing to do with the origin of the multiplication of languages.”<sup>6</sup> The building of the Tower of Babel symbolizes “imperial praxis,” against which Yahweh’s destruction of the tower is an anti-imperial counterproject. When Fernandez juxtaposes this reading of the Babel story with exploited Chinese labor to help build the American empire in the gold mines and on the transcontinental railroad, we are invited to see how biblical text and history can speak to each other to enrich our understanding of both.<sup>7</sup>

In contrast, the Pentecost event (Acts 2) for Fernandez “provides us with the hermeneutic lens to move from deconstruction to construction of alternative ways of thinking, dwelling, and acting.”<sup>8</sup> The Pentecost community formed by the Holy Spirit

is expressive of the inherent diversity of human life. . . . The Spirit, in its concrete embodiment, expresses itself in various modes of being human, with different cultures

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<sup>6</sup> Eleazar S. Fernandez, “From Babel to Pentecost,” 30.

<sup>7</sup> Fernandez points out that “The Chinese were among those first [among Asian immigrants] to participate in the building of the American empire” (ibid., 36).

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 42.

and languages. Diversity is not something that is simply to be tolerated but to be affirmed, for it is an expression of the Spirit: it is life as such in its beauty and challenge. The Pentecost event points to this profound reality (Acts 2:1-13).<sup>9</sup>

Though not addressing the Asian American situation per se, John Kenneth Gibson supports Fernandez's understanding regarding the Holy Spirit's calling us to recognize the need for diversity, specifically within the Episcopal Church (Gibson is an Episcopal parish priest). Gibson reminds us that Martin Luther King's criticism of the church as tolerating—perhaps even promoting—11:00 on Sunday as “the most segregated hour in this nation” has not been adequately addressed: “The church at the congregational level remains highly segregated,” Gibson writes.<sup>10</sup> He calls us to account for taking diversity at the aggregate (e.g., diocesan, provincial, or national) level to be an adequate substitute for diversity at the congregational level. He stresses the importance of being in actual relationship with the other, which takes place more fully at the congregational level than at the periodic meetings of congregations of different ethnicities at diocesan or national gatherings. Drawing on a wide range of theological sources from non-Episcopal denominations as well as on Scripture, Gibson eloquently calls on us “to appropriate the unifying power of the Spirit to realize the diversity that is [the church's] true nature, its eschatological calling, and the hope of the world.”<sup>11</sup>

Rachel A. R. Bundang uses the text of Jeremiah's letter to the exiles in Babylon (29:4-23) to shed light on the Asian American experience of diaspora.

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>10</sup> John Kenneth Gibson, “A Pneumatological Theology of Diversity,” *Anglican Theological Review* 94, no. 3 (Summer 2012): 430.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 449. When Gibson does refer to Episcopal voices such as Eric H. F. Law and Stephanie Spellers, it is to point out how the grounds on which they base their call for diversity are more Christological than pneumatological. See 433-434.

I chose to focus here on Jeremiah's letter to the exiles . . . because in those lines I sense historical, emotional, and spiritual resonances with Asian/Pacific American experiences of uprooting and building new homes both physical and spiritual as depicted in our histories, arts, and literatures.<sup>12</sup>

Through sensitive engagement with the biblical text and its historical context, Bundang directs our attention to the complexity and diversity of Asian American diasporic experiences and strategies, which depend on nation of origin, historical forces, and other conditions that vary from one immigrant to another. She takes us from reading Scripture into lived history, and, through theological reflection, to hope.

For any community—and especially a community undergoing as great a stress as exile—tradition may serve as an anchor to identity and autonomy. But traditions undoubtedly change over time, sometimes in outward form, sometimes in inner substance and meaning. Whether for Judah in Babylon or A/PI communities in North America, Christian or not, living out memories of home and adhering to practices of home, even with adjustments and reorientations that are sometimes necessary, are ultimately acts not only of faith but of sustaining, creative hope. The exile we first view as judgment may yet turn out to be a gift, revealing yet another face of the sacred that was never gone in the first place. In the heart of our pain, alienation, wandering, and loss, God remembers the promises made to us, speaks to us, and cherishes us still.<sup>13</sup>

### *Chinese American Transnationality as an Historical Correlate of Diaspora*

The first Chinese immigrants to the United States, in the mid-nineteenth century, were men in search of work, and, if possible, fortune. Coming primarily from the southeastern coastal region of Canton and its environs, these men often left not only their families of origin behind, but also families that they themselves had started. Even if American immigration policies had not been hostile to the importation of whole families, bringing wives (much less children) with them would have hampered the men's flexibility to move quickly in response to shifting labor needs and employment or

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<sup>12</sup> Rachel A. R. Bundang, "Home as Memory, Metaphor, and Promise," 88.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 99.

business opportunities. In any case most Chinese immigrants saw themselves as sojourners, not settlers. With any luck (and some of them did indeed fulfill their aspirations) they would send regular remittances home until the day came when they could return to their home village or district with a large enough fortune to enter the wealthy class. Wealth and success to be enjoyed back in China was the goal, not necessarily a new life as Americans of Chinese descent—at least at first.

Those who were somewhat successful were able to send remittances back to China that had much more buying power back home than in the United States:

[E]ven at the reduced wages of a Chinese laborer in America of the mid-nineteenth century, the money they made changed the lives of their families back in China. And from this flowed a less well-known consequence of Chinese emigration to America.

At this time in the nineteenth century, one week's pay in America was equivalent to several months of wages in China. Thus, from the meager earnings of many Chinese in America emerged a new class of aristocrats in Guangdong province.<sup>14</sup>

And yet, apparently, this sudden influx of wealth into the Chinese village economy could have untoward results. As Iris Chang tells it, the families in Toishan county, recipients of gold mining remittances, quickly abandoned their traditional livelihoods based on agriculture and handicrafts, and came to rely totally on the income from their male relatives in the United States:

Within a few decades, Toishan, a region once renowned as one of the most entrepreneurial in China and which had supported itself in the mid-1850s, was fast becoming a welfare state, with family after family living on the backbreaking labor of a Chinese husband working round the clock half a world away.<sup>15</sup>

Not only were the local economy and traditional work habits of Toishan disrupted by the inflow of wealth from hardworking men in the United States, but hedonism and a luxury-

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<sup>14</sup> Iris Chang, *The Chinese in America: A Narrative History* (New York: Penguin, 2003), 66-67.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

oriented materialism took hold. Rather than strengthening their families by improving family income, the men of “Gold Mountain” sent home excessive wealth that ended up destroying the family lives and structures that the men had hoped to sustain.

An approximate mirror-image counterpart to the distensions of family evident in the narratives of nineteenth-century Chinese emigration to the United States, is the “parachute kids” phenomenon of the late twentieth-century.<sup>16</sup> With the rapid rise of the Asia-Pacific region on the world economic stage, bringing with it employment at all levels, advanced career opportunities, and a wider distribution of personal wealth, there are Chinese parents sending their children alone to the United States to take advantage of the greater access to educational opportunity. These are not young Chinese adults being sent here for college or graduate school, though those are certainly included. These are children and adolescents being sent here as young as 8 years old, to live with relatives or paid caretakers, in order to get an American education that will make them competitive for admission to American universities. Most often, of course, it is families of wealth who are capable of this strategy.

While on the surface it may seem to be a puzzling extravagance, the “parachute kid” phenomenon is largely driven by the relative constriction of educational opportunity in the home country. Most parachute kids come from Taiwan, but others come from

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<sup>16</sup> I speak of “the distended family” as a mild pun on the extended family that is a trope in the Chinese family ideal. In contrast to the American nuclear family, the Chinese extended family, with not just parents but grandparents in shared or proximate residence, allows for the full play of Confucian family values, where the honor and respect of grandchildren and even great grandchildren is enjoyed as the reward for the success of having raised a socioeconomically prosperous and numerically increasing family. The distended family that I speak of in this essay refers to those families who, during the nineteenth-century immigrant experience, chose to sacrifice physical proximity and unity in search of economic advancement, and also to those families who, in the late twentieth century, as I will narrate, make the same sacrifice in the same direction, but exiling a different generation.

Hong Kong, the People's Republic of China, and from the Chinese diaspora in Southeast Asian places like Singapore and Malaysia.<sup>17</sup> In these parts of Asia, competition is fierce for places in the relatively few elite universities, and so the families have looked elsewhere. The United States, with relatively plentiful educational resources, is an attractive alternative. Asian students may be assisted in competing against American students by the persistent thread of anti-intellectualism in American culture, in contrast to the millennia of ingrained positive value assigned to education in Asian, especially Chinese, culture—a product largely of Confucian thinking.

The parachute kid phenomenon, apparently, has rarely given rise to serious family disruption, and the children as well as the parents understand fully the necessity of the sacrifice and its intended outcome.<sup>18</sup> It does seem, however, an ironic expression of the Confucian values presumed to be a part of most Asian cultures. Of the simultaneous priorities of family discipline and relationship, education, and socioeconomic advancement, the second two seem to take clear precedence over the first.

Whatever the challenges of transnationality as an aspect of both traditional empire and contemporary globalization, one cannot deny that it is a fact, one that has theological implications, as I will discuss in chapter 4. Yet, we need to treat this sweeping phenomenon with some caution, complexity, and nuance. Andrea Louie offers assistance in doing this by examining transnationality through her anthropological research focused on the “In Search of Roots” program in which she, as a Chinese American along with

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<sup>17</sup> Min Zhou, “‘Parachute Kids’ in Southern California: The Educational Experience of Chinese Children in Transnational Families,” in *Contemporary Chinese America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2009), 203.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 213-17.

others, visited her ancestral village in Guangdong not as a tourist but on a program of genealogical research and extensive interactions with relatives and other village residents.

Louie reminds us that transnationality is not an automatic dynamic of Chinese American identity by virtue of our ancestry. Realized transnationality only comes through intention and desire (e.g., to re-learn Chinese language and culture or to learn them for the first time), opportunity, study, and commitment. She reminds us also that transnationality depends on the circumstances of emigration—some people left China to escape once and for all, and so nostalgia for the rediscovery of roots would not be a priority for them, while others may have left only under economic or political duress and retain a longing for “home.”

Louie also points out that transnationality between China and the United States is subject to the changes in each nation and in their unfolding relationships with each other. This not only affects the logistics of transnationality—how fluidly and easily people can move between one place and the other, or communicate over the internet—but also affects the formation of identity itself.

As China reopens to the outside world, and the old Maoist order unfolds onto fast-changing, outward looking, capitalist-influenced terrain, identities are being reworked. Categories of class, rural versus urban origins, north versus south, foreigner versus Chinese, and Chinese versus overseas Chinese are being renegotiated.<sup>19</sup>

### *Later Chinese American Generations in Diaspora*

It would be tempting to assume that the work of the immigrant generation to carve out a place in American society is then built upon by a second generation with better English skills and a more naturally acquired understanding of the American cultural

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<sup>19</sup> Andrea Louie, *Chineseness Across Borders: Renegotiating Chinese Identities in China and the United States* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 15-16.



milieu, such that the third generation need hardly experience any alienation whatsoever. And one would like to think that so much time has passed since the institutional insults of American policy from the 1850s through the 1960s that even recent Asian immigrants do not have to suffer through the tired behaviors of anti-Asian American racism.

A cursory reading of *Asian American X*, published in 2004, will disabuse anyone of such facile notions.<sup>20</sup> A collection of personal essays by Asian American college students, this volume is both heartbreaking for the stories so familiar to those of us from the boomer and earlier generations, and also exciting because of the courageous, independent, and self-aware voices that tell the stories. The stories are no longer those of full-blooded descendants of Asian immigrants only; they also include the stories of Koreans adopted by white American parents and children of interracial (Asian-white) and interethnic (e.g., half-Chinese, half-Thai) marriages. Many of the essays are by people who grew up in various parts of California, but there are also natives of Nanjing, Taipei, and Kobe, and of Dayton, New Orleans, Evansville, and Omaha.

Though they struggle with many of the same responses from “mainstream,” “white,” “American” society suffered by their predecessors in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the strength of their voices suggests that they will push back against these responses in a more healthily forceful way. Some, though not all, indicate that they will resist the binaries embedded in a hyphenated identity. Curtis Steuber, a Korean adopted with his twin sister by a family in Holland, Michigan, states:

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<sup>20</sup> Arar Han and John Hsu, eds., *Asian American X: An Intersection of 21st Century Asian American Voices* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004).

Stereotypes are needlessly placed on people and can hurt reputations and stifle personal growth. This is part of why I choose not to be South Korean, American, or be labeled by anyone. I am a person, and that is the only thing people should see. To me ethnicity is unnecessary, a crutch that I have purposely striven not to have. I don't know if that is good or bad. By limiting myself like this, I might be missing out on some good friendships, but I'm okay with that. I understand the consequences and I still choose not to join ethnic organizations. I don't know if that is right for everyone, but it's right for me.<sup>21</sup>

Those tempted to call this young man naïve based on their historical experience of race and prejudice, might be well advised to wait and see what he does with his youthful resolve. If he achieves his goal, he will carve out more breathing space for all of us.

In the only reading I could identify written from a psychological (as opposed to sociological or historical) perspective, clinical psychologist May Paomay Tung offers pithy insights into Chinese American identity formation across generations, in a useful study based on her clinical experience.<sup>22</sup> Tung discusses the tension between the emphasis on family harmony in Chinese culture and the individualism and tolerance of conflict in American culture:

I often hear self-criticisms from Chinese Americans and their wishes to be more “assertive” and “confrontational” in their dealings with their parents and people in general. Being confrontational, assertive, rebellious, and stressing the negative are all ways a person can differentiate oneself from others en route to individualism. . . . Chinese tend to deal with conflicts in private. Many young Chinese Americans, however, feel they should also challenge and “do something” about their differences with their parents, in keeping with what they see all around them. They want to separate themselves from the original “tree”; they want to change the boundary.<sup>23</sup>

Tung offers some insight as to how tensions between later generations of American-born Chinese and their parents—who may also be American-born but carry within them vestigial traces of Confucian values and parenting styles—might be

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<sup>21</sup> Curtis Steuber, “Creating Myself,” in Han and Hsu, *Asian American X*, 118.

<sup>22</sup> May Paomay Tung, *Chinese Americans and Their Immigrant Parents: Conflict, Identity, and Values* (Binghamton, NY: Haworth, 2000).

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 15-16.

negotiated. What to the Confucian-influenced parent might be understood as simple parental caring and solicitousness can arouse in an adamantly non-Confucian child, whose spirit was formed in a more American mold, a visceral resistance to what is perceived as excess control.<sup>24</sup>

Tung cites the hurt that even highly successful Chinese Americans remember and carry forward with them from their childhood, linking their experience of the taunts of American racism with the actual strangeness of their immigrant parents. She continues,

These young people recall childhood experiences when they were called names, teased, chased on streets, and beaten up, while knowing that even their parents were helpless to protect them. Now, as adults, some of them still perceive their parents as socially inept and, therefore are reluctant to take them to Western-style restaurants or other places primarily frequented by white Americans. I have also been told how, socially, some of these young Chinese Americans feel more “protected” and “worthy” when they are in the company of white Americans, as if elevating their status. Others may go the opposite direction by keeping company only with other Chinese Americans. Still others keep trying both ways, hoping to find a good balance. All three “methods” leave them feeling incomplete.<sup>25</sup>

As I will elaborate in chapter 4, I believe that exactly what the hyphen means between “Chinese” and “American” is completely up to each one of us, and that there is no wrong answer. Some Chinese-Americans who consider others a “banana” clearly think that there is a right formula for ethnic authenticity and diasporic accommodation. Some white people will insist (however tacitly or unconsciously) either (1) that Asians are indeed “perpetual foreigners,” and will therefore treat us in a hundred alienating ways both trivial and traumatic (see chapter 2); or (2) that Asian heritage is of little consequence as some of us appear to be fully integrated and even wildly successful

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 5-22. Tung’s chapter is entitled “What Is in a Name? Culture and Personal Boundary.”

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 40.

Americans (see the discussion of the Asian as model minority in chapter 4). They may believe that we are simply complaining of a problem where none exists.

But neither of those outside mirrors for Asian American identity formation is being held up by someone living the life each of us Asian Americans is living, and thus, in our hard-won arrival at our own individual formulas of autonomy and accommodation, we deny that others are qualified to judge the validity of those formulas.<sup>26</sup> Over-reliance on either outside mirror will contribute to our loss of autonomy and agency in finding our own formulas for identity and existential wholeness.

Ultimately our American lives and our Chinese lives must be defined and lived by each of us for ourselves as we make our way in a universal diaspora. As the younger voices in *Asian American X* are also discovering, the road maps available to us—including those handed to us by our parents—may not be all that helpful, or may not be anything we can use at a particular moment in time. But it is an interesting and hopeful place to be, wherever this hyphen places us, in this time in world history and, in my case, in this time in the life of Christian faith. Any reading of world history shows the persistence of blindness and prejudice, of racism and sin. With awareness, knowledge, and truthful story-telling, however, and with the grace of our speaking together in love—across boundaries, generations, space, and time—there will also, always, be hope.

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<sup>26</sup> For the idea of “mirrors” in helping to form self-identity, see Tung’s chapter 2, “The Environment for Chinese-American Self-Identity,” in Tung, *Chinese Americans and Their Immigrant Parents*, 23-38.

## Chapter 2

### Aliens and Alliances: Asians in the United States

*“No, Where Are You Really From?”*

The phenomenon of “the Asian as perpetual foreigner” has been frequently described. Often, the description begins with the conversational encounter that begins with “Where are you from?” The place names may change, but the questions and answers remain pretty much the same. Gale A. Yee will say “Chicago” (the place of her birth), or “Boston” (the place of her current residence).<sup>1</sup> For Frank H. Wu, at the time of publication of his classic text, *Yellow*, it might be Cleveland, Detroit, or Washington, D.C.<sup>2</sup> The response of the Asian American person may indicate years-long, if not generations-long, residence and roots in the United States, and yet the questioner is not satisfied with a US location as the correct place of origin. When the American of Asian descent (who almost always knows the true import of this question) answers what any non-Asian would be expected to answer (in my case, e.g., “Philadelphia” or “New York”), the question is inevitably repeated, “No, where are you *really* from?” The “No, . . .” is a significant part of the oblivious insult. It tells Asians that in saying “New York,” or “Philadelphia,” we have given a wrong answer, that it is our Euro-American

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<sup>1</sup> Gale A. Yee, “‘She Stood in Tears Amid the Alien Corn’: Ruth, the Perpetual Foreigner and Model Minority,” in *Off the Menu: Asian and Asian North American Women’s Religion & Theology*, ed. Rita Nakashima Brock, Jung Ha Kim, Kwok Pui-lan, and Seung Ai Yang (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2007), 46.

<sup>2</sup> Frank H. Wu, *Yellow: Race in American Beyond Black and White*, (New York: Basic, 2002), 80.

interlocutors' prerogative to determine that the answer is not correct until we say "Seoul," "Singapore," or "Shanghai."<sup>3</sup>

A short interview feature called "The Race Card," aired on National Public Radio, March 13, 2013, featured a young Korean woman speaking about the phenomenon I have just described.<sup>4</sup> An even more recent humorous example went mildly viral on Facebook—a scripted encounter on YouTube between a Korean-American female jogger and a "regular [his word] American" man who engages her in the "Where are you from?" conversation. As is often the case, the on-line comments (compiled by the originator in a separate video presented by the same two actors) are as instructive as the video itself. The heat with which some comments maintain that the encounter is not the least bit racist and that the Asian woman is overreacting shows that, despite the nuance that I hope to introduce in this chapter and in chapter 4, the alienation implied in "the Asian as perpetual foreigner" is still a live issue, a persistent pattern of behavior, regardless of how long ago the individual Asian immigrated to the United States.<sup>5</sup>

Try as we might to draw the attention of our non-Asian (usually white) interlocutors to the impact of their behavior, and to persuade them to question their own motives for asking the question, for treating Asian Americans differently from other American people of immigrant descent, we somehow do not succeed in conveying that this tired and unoriginal pattern is also profoundly alienating. We have not made it clear

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<sup>3</sup> The term "microaggression" has been used to describe this and similar examples of racial insult, as reported in Tanzina Vega, "The Big Topic on Campus: Racial 'Microaggressions,'" *New York Times*, March 21, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/22/us/as-diversity-increases-slights-get-subtler-but-still-sting.html>.

<sup>4</sup> NPR Race Card Project, March 13, 2013, <http://www.npr.org/2013/03/13/173816975/six-words-ask-who-I-am-not-what>.

<sup>5</sup> The video was created by Kent Tanaka. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DWynJkN5HbQ>.

enough that the pattern has a long and well-documented public history. An entire multi-disciplinary literature has grown up to try to explain why the phenomenon exists.<sup>6</sup>

“Where are you *really* from?” is not the only conversational mechanism by which the Asian as perpetual foreigner is reinforced. Frank H. Wu explicates multiple variations of the conversation that objectify the Asian as a perpetual foreigner in American society.<sup>7</sup> We each of us also have our set of variations. I offer the following out of my experience in the Episcopal Church—and, unfortunately, these are not the only three. (1) The first time I was a lector for Sunday worship was sometime in the late 1990s. Immediately after the reading, then during coffee hour, and finally outside the church building as we were departing, one insistent (white) parishioner repeatedly complimented me on the quality of my reading. I had already begun to wonder at the extravagance and repetition of the man’s praise when he uttered the clarifying question: “And, so, English is your first language?” (2) After my first sermon at a church where I served as the interim rector—and one of the reasons for their calling me was approval of my preaching style—someone asked a more senior parishioner, a down-to-earth Philadelphian, “Well, Sarah, how did you like his preaching?” Sarah replied, “I couldn’t understand a word he said because of the accent.” It should be noted here that Pew reports that “more than half of Chinese Americans (52%) speak English proficiently, compared with 63% of Asian Americans in

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<sup>6</sup> “This study has been an attempt to answer why it is that an Asian American in the United States, no matter how long and for how many generations he or she might have been here, will still be regularly asked “Where are you from?” Henry Yu, *Thinking Orientals: Migration, Contact, and Exoticism in Modern America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), vi.

<sup>7</sup> Wu, “The Perpetual Foreigner: Yellow Peril in the Pacific Century,” chap. 3 in *Yellow*, 79-129, esp. 80-87.

general and 90% of the US population overall.”<sup>8</sup> Yes, our English proficiency is statistically not near the mark of the general US population, but with over 50% of Chinese Americans being proficient, the fact that some of us can be found to speak perfect English on a given occasion should cease to come as a surprise. (3) And finally, before my ordination to the priesthood, and for years afterward, my bishop would insist that I was called to start an ethnic Chinese congregation, despite my repeated assertions that my Chinese language skills had atrophied beyond any hope of recovery.

The astonished and pained reactions of my liberal Episcopal-church friends when I tell them anecdotes such as these bring me to the heart of this chapter. I have had too many unsuccessful experiences trying to explain to white people the phenomenon of the Asian as perpetual foreigner using the “Where are you *really* from?” conversation as the primary evidence. They tend to seek well-meaning alternative explanations (e.g., “Well, maybe the parishioner was talking about your New York accent.”)

In my experience it is difficult to make the point to white Americans that their persistent estrangement of Asian Americans through these unconscious language habits is a significant problem. We Asian Americans may need to ask whether we are doing a good enough job making the case for our share of the story of racism in the United States. At best, like one of my nephews, the one who has never set foot in Asia (all five of my nephews and nieces being American-born), and who was asked by close friends which country he would be rooting for during the Beijing Olympics, we are perplexed by our

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<sup>8</sup> Pew Research Center, *The Rise of Asian Americans*, updated edition April 4, 2013. <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/files/2013/04/Asian-Americans-new-full-report-04-2013.pdf>, 39. Proficiency drops to 43% for foreign-born Chinese people (ibid., 94).



friends, wondering by what non sequitur those with whom we thought we were at home do not necessarily consider us to be at home with them.

It may be significant to note that despite the Chinese having been one of the earliest Asian groups to come to the United States, we are among the most likely to identify discrimination as a problem. According to the Pew survey,

Compared with other U.S. Asian groups, Chinese Americans are among the most likely to say discrimination against people from their country of origin is a major (16%) or minor (56%) problem. A quarter (24%) say discrimination is not a problem. Chinese Americans are less upbeat than most other U.S. Asian groups about their relationships with other major racial and ethnic groups. Only about two-in-ten say Chinese Americans and whites get along very well. And even fewer say Chinese get along very well with blacks or Hispanics.<sup>9</sup>

The trope of the “Asian as perpetual foreigner” is not just a function of a generalized physical differentiation between Americans of Asian and European descent, nor is it the innocuous unreflective and momentary geographical curiosity of white people. It is not a paranoid figment of the Asian American imagination. Rather, it is continuous with a history of institutional and legally enforced acts that deprived Asians of human dignity in the American context. Without coming to grips with this history, we Asian Americans risk appearing to our white fellow citizens as pathetic whiners, feebly claiming a small foothold in the great American reflection on race.

#### *Institutionalized Alienation and Legal Disenfranchisement*

In his classic study *Strangers from a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans*, Ronald Takaki writes,

As the first Asian group to enter America, the Chinese merit our close attention. What happened to them in the nineteenth century represented the beginning of a pattern for the ways Asians would be viewed and treated here—their transformation

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<sup>9</sup> Pew, *The Rise of Asian Americans*, 40.

into Georg Simmel's "strangers." But their identity as outsiders was determined not only by their entry but also by a complex combination of economic, ideological, and political developments in American society. New "necessities" drove the Chinese after they arrived in Gold Mountain.<sup>10</sup>

The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 would seem to be the signal grievous original historical sin of anti-Chinese white racism in the United States. But previous groundwork had been carefully and deliberately laid for this legislative act of racial violence. Chinese arrived on the western shores of North America with strange language, strange customs, strange culture, and a decidedly non-western-European appearance—it is not racist to notice this now, nor to have noticed this in the 1850s. In fact, the perception was fixed even before the Chinese arrived.

[At the time of their initial immigration], because they were not of European ancestry, Chinese were visibly different in their facial features, language, and clothing. These differences caused them additional difficulties because of the way their physical appearances were compounded by Western racial ideologies. . . . Since Chinese customs, dress, and facial features clearly set them apart as "resident aliens," European Americans signified these physical differences into a "qualitative difference" that resulted in institutionalized injustice and violence. Even before they first set foot on American soil, Chinese had an unfavorable image through the writings of traders, diplomats, and missionaries. . . . With their access to public opinion through the pulpits and publications, it was the missionaries who were actually most influential in (mis)educating the public. They deserve much of the blame for creating negative stereotypes of the Chinese.<sup>11</sup>

And so, almost from the beginning, and for predictable reasons, white Americans would pursue a policy program that would keep Chinese migrants looking strange, trapping them in a vicious circle barring them from acceptability. Repeated institutional legislative actions cemented their fundamental estrangement, their perpetual foreignness.

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<sup>10</sup> Ronald Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans* (New York: Little, Brown, 1998), 80.

<sup>11</sup> Russell G. Moy, "Resident Aliens of the Diaspora: 1 Peter and Chinese Protestants in San Francisco," *Semeia* 90/91 (2002): 54-55.

“Initially, the Chinese were welcomed in California,” writes Takaki. He cites favorable words of welcome and of hope in the press and from politicians.

In his January 1852 address to the California legislature, Governor John McDougal declared that more Chinese migrants would be needed to help drain the state’s swamplands, praising them as “one of the most worthy classes of our newly adopted citizens. . . .”<sup>12</sup>

Within months, however, the very same legislature, under pressure from American miners, passed the foreign miners’ license tax, imposing a monthly payment from every foreign miner who did not desire to become a citizen. Chinese were barred access to naturalization by a federal law of 1790, which restricted naturalization to white persons. This miners’ tax was repealed by the federal Civil Rights Act of 1870, but in the meantime other California laws were passed to limit further immigration and to disadvantage Chinese labor vis-à-vis white labor. “Clearly,” Takaki writes, “all of this legislation was seeking not revenue but Chinese exclusion.”<sup>13</sup>

In the gold mines, on the farm fields, and on the railroad, Chinese laborers were consistently paid lower wages solely based on their race, alienating them from white and African American laborers who might have held the same jobs. In well-documented cases, such as building the transcontinental railroad, the work of Chinese men was described by contemporaneous sources as not only cheaper, but often of higher quality than their European or white American competitors. White workers were not slow in reacting out of their understandable resentment and envy. When some white laborers on the Central Pacific Railroad began to conspire to drive Chinese workers off the job,

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<sup>12</sup> Takaki, *Strangers*, 80-81.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

Charles Crocker, one of the four heads of the Central Pacific Corporation threatened to replace all white workers with Chinese.<sup>14</sup>

Because of their reputation as disciplined workers willing to accept lower wages, and also because of their lack of political power as people barred from citizenship, Chinese men were deliberately pitted against workers of other ethnicities as a matter of control and exploitation. After the Civil War and the emancipation of black slaves, a conference convened in Memphis, Tennessee in 1869 to plan the importation of Chinese labor both to replace black labor, and to persuade newly freed black people to return to the plantations under working conditions as close as possible to those of the slave system. Southern planters underestimated, however, the self-understanding of Chinese workers as most assuredly not slaves, and their ability to understand and negotiate contracts and to press their rights under such contracts through the courts. The Southern experiment to exploit Chinese labor proved unworkable, and “by 1915, scarcely a single plantation still employed Chinese labor.”<sup>15</sup>

Using Chinese workers to displace other workers and to lower labor costs was not just a strategy of the frontier West and the quasi-feudal South. In 1870, to break a strike of Irish workers in a shoe factory in North Adams, Massachusetts, Chinese workers were transported from San Francisco. Unionized Irish workers tried to recruit the Chinese into

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<sup>14</sup> Iris Chang, *The Chinese in America: A Narrative History* (New York: Penguin, 2003), 55-58.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 93-99. Quotation is from p. 99. While Chang explains the end of the brief interlude of Chinese labor in the South as a result of Chinese acuity about their legal rights and power of negotiation, Takaki (*Strangers*, 95) also points to the Chinese preference for working in the “small trades and industries in the city,” as well as to the end of Reconstruction, which allowed for new systems that re-institutionalized the exploitation of black labor in the South. Both factors undoubtedly contributed to the failure to exploit Chinese labor in the South over the long term. See Douglas A. Blackmon, *Slavery by Another Name: The Re-Enslavement of Black Americans from the Civil War to World War II* (New York: Knopf, 2009).

their union, but the effort failed. Seeing the writing on the wall, white workers in other North Adams shoe factories capitulated to owners' demands for lower wages. The exploitative and divisive use of cheap Chinese labor was taken up in other Northeast locations, such as a steam laundry in Belleville, New Jersey and a cutlery factory in Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania.<sup>16</sup>

Immediately, however, a dilemma arose. Even as the quality and low cost of Chinese labor was being publicly lauded, the issue of whether Chinese people could be more broadly integrated into American society, and whether they could, in large numbers, become American citizens was recognized as a problem. Concomitant with this recognition was the understanding that increased reliance on Chinese labor would continue to create problems for white workers.

One answer to both questions was a proposal to reduce the Chinese into a permanently degraded caste-labor force: they would be in effect a unique, transnational industrial reserve army of migrant laborers forced to be foreigners forever. . . . Part of America's process of production, they would not be allowed to become part of her body politic. . . . [T]he Chinese would be allowed to enter and work temporarily, then return to their homeland while others would come here as replacements. The Chinese would be used to service the labor needs of America's industry without threatening the racial homogeneity of the country's citizenry. The migrant workers would be inducted into a labor-supply process that would move labor between China and the United States in a circular pattern. Anti-Chinese laws, economic exploitation, and racial antagonism would assist in this process, compelling the Chinese to leave America after a limited period of employment. They would remain "strangers."<sup>17</sup>

Thus we can see that there was a consistent and comprehensible prelude to the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. For decades leading up to its passage, and even prior to the arrival of the first Chinese immigrants, systemic and institutional forces imposed

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<sup>16</sup> Takaki, *Strangers*, 96-99; Chang, *The Chinese in America*, 99-102.

<sup>17</sup> Takaki, *Strangers*, 99-100.

perpetual foreignness on them, forcing their estrangement not only from the white mainstream culturally dominant middle class, but also from the white American and white European working class with which they shared an economic interest.

It should come as no historical surprise, then, that despite the participation of Chinese miners in the California Gold Rush, despite the use of Chinese labor and experience in draining the swamps and marshes of the San Joaquin and Sacramento River basins, creating huge swaths of fertile farmland, and despite the brute labor and technical skill of Chinese workers in building the transcontinental railroad—all contributing to the burgeoning wealth of the new state of California—it was two California members of Congress who proposed what became the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882: Senator John F. Miller, who introduced the original bill in 1881, which was vetoed by President Chester Arthur, and Representative Horace Page, who proposed the slightly less harsh bill that was passed and signed by President Arthur in 1882. The bill that became law reduced the ban on the immigration of Chinese laborers from twenty years to ten, and, instead of banning all immigration, allowed entry for select groups of Chinese people: “merchants, teachers, students, and their household servants.”<sup>18</sup>

It must be noted that both bills received widespread Congressional and popular support. When President Arthur vetoed the first bill, he “was hanged in effigy, his image burned by furious mobs.” A lonely opponent of the original legislation, Senator George Frisbie Hoar from Massachusetts, was excoriated by the *New York Times*.<sup>19</sup> We cannot understand the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 simply as the injustice of political leaders

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<sup>18</sup> Chang, *Chinese in America*, 130-32.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 131-32.

and economic overlords; we have no choice but to see it as the express will of a wide cross-section of the American populace at the time. Chinese people living in the United States in the waning decades of the nineteenth century would have had good reason to understand that an entire society and an entire civilization considered them unwelcome, a people of no worth or dignity, monstrous examples of human depravity. Any Chinese who could read English could see such estimations in print.<sup>20</sup>

Passage of the Exclusion Act gave rise to a series of violent attacks on Chinese communities. “During a period of terror now known as ‘the Driving Out,’ several Chinese communities in the West were subjected to a level of violence that approached genocide.”<sup>21</sup> Legislated alienation, not surprisingly, empowered extra-legal interpersonal violence. As the will of the American people expressed itself, the Exclusion Act was renewed and embellished over the years, as sketched in Table 1.

**Table 1. The Chinese Exclusion Act and Its Successors**

1882	The Chinese Exclusion Act—federal law banning immigration of Chinese laborers for ten years, with the exception of merchants, teachers, students, and their household servants.
1884	Amendment to the Exclusion Act, permitting only those Chinese laborers resident in the United States prior to November 1880 the right to travel freely between China and the United States The Chinese person traveling to China would be issued a special certificate guaranteeing his right to return.
1888	Scott Act—canceled all certificates granting Chinese laborers the right of return to the United States from China.
1889	<i>Chae Chan Ping v. United States</i> —the Supreme Court upholds the Scott Act, describing Chinese immigrants as a people “residing apart by themselves, and adhering to the customs and usages of their own country.”
1892	Exclusion Act expires, and is replaced by the Geary Act—Chinese

<sup>20</sup> Apparently the opposite case is argued by Andrew Gyory in *Closing the Gate: Race, Politics, and the Chinese Exclusion Act*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 257: “In all senses of the term, Chinese exclusion was a *political* act.” Cited in Russell Moy, “Resident Aliens of the Diaspora: 1 Peter and Chinese Protestants in San Francisco,” *Semeia* 90/91 (2002): 58. Moy seems to accept Gyory’s analysis, while I find it hard to believe that politicians had to very work hard to stir up racist fervor, as it seems that a strong potential for it was already in place.

<sup>21</sup> Chang, *Chinese in America*, 132. See also Takaki, *Strangers*, 92.

	immigration suspended for another ten years; all Chinese laborers in the United States required to register with the government within one year to obtain certificates of lawful residence; Chinese without this certificate subject to immediate deportation; deprives Chinese immigrants of protection in courts.
1893, 1895	<i>Fong Yue Ting v. United States</i> (1893) and <i>Lem Moon Sing v. United States</i> (1895) uphold the Geary Act.
1894-1898	Wong Kim Ark, Chinese-American born in San Francisco, is denied re-entry upon returning from a visit to his parents in China. Claims birthright citizenship under the Fourteenth Amendment. Supreme Court rules in his favor in 1898.
1902	Geary Act expires. Congress extends period of exclusion indefinitely and continues to deny naturalization to Chinese already resident in United States.
1905	<i>United States v. Ju Toy</i> . Supreme Court rules that Chinese immigrants denied entry, even those claiming US citizenship, could no longer appeal to the courts; gave jurisdiction on these matters to the secretary of commerce and labor.
1943	Magnuson Act—Chinese exclusion abolished, providing for an annual quota of 105 Chinese immigrants, and giving Chinese who had lawfully entered the United States the right to naturalization.
1965	Immigration Act of 1965 abolishes national-origins quotas, and provides for annual admission of 170,000 immigrants from the Eastern Hemisphere and 120,000 from the Western Hemisphere; 20,000 per country allowed from the Eastern Hemisphere; exempted from quota would be immediate family members—specifically spouses, minor children, and parents of US citizens.

Data from Chang, *Chinese in America*, 130-44, 225-27; Takaki, *Strangers*, 419.

The history of Chinese alienation and exclusion from the first wave of immigration until the 1965 Hart-Celler Immigration Act is obviously a story of racism, and even when institutional racism diminishes, the dynamics of racism persist.

I asked the Dialog Partners about their experience of racism in general, but started out more gently by asking whether they felt any positive resonance or any negative tensions between their ethnicity or cultural heritage and their participation in an Episcopal congregation, and then asking whether they could detect any recognition—either positive or negative—from their fellow congregation members with regard to their Chinese American identity.



Very few of them were able to name any positive resonance or negative tensions between their ethnicity and cultural heritage and being an Episcopalian. It does not seem that any of them chose the Episcopal Church for any reasons related to their identity—though, as will be shown in the next chapter, some of them have generational ties to Anglicanism from their roots in Hong Kong.

Neither do most of them report pervasive and ongoing personal experience of racism in the wider society. Some of them could point to egregious instances of systemic racism—related to work, for instance, or hostile threats from neighbors early in the immigration experience. One or two report instances of anti-Chinese racism that they have observed directed against others, but not against themselves. These instances of systemic racism mostly seem to have been in the distant past; experiences of individual prejudice and stereotyping, however, continue into the present, even if “fairly infrequently.” “Occasionally I will get the offhand remark about the Chinese or Asians being the model minority, but not often anymore as I have aged,” said one Dialog Partner. “I think at some point an Asian begins to look like just another older person as compared to someone exotic, which was more the case when I was younger.”<sup>22</sup>

#### *Inter-ethnic and Inter-racial Alliances*

The story of American anti-Chinese racism must not be understood in isolation, however. Given the cliché that “America is a nation of immigrants”—in other words, a nation of people in diaspora—the work of creating alliances across diasporic communities to combat American racism is essential work, and may be harder halfway

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<sup>22</sup> Yvonne, e-mail message to author, July 24, 2013.

through the United States' third century than one might wish. For instance, south Philadelphia, historically an ethnic neighborhood most famously associated with Italian immigrants—the home of the Italian Market— has more recently become a multicultural enclave, with African Americans, Hispanics, and newly immigrated Asians. On December 3, 2009, racial violence broke out in South Philadelphia High School, where 70% of students are black, and 18% are Asian. The incident and its aftermath made national headlines. The civil rights suit that was filed claimed that

the Philadelphia school district acted with “deliberate indifference” toward the harassment and failed to prevent the Dec. 3 attacks. . . . Asian students’ pleas for help and protection were ignored by school employees. . . . Asian students say black students routinely pelt them with food, beat, punch and kick them in school hallways and bathrooms, and hurl racial epithets like “Hey, Chinese!” and “Yo, Dragon Ball!” . . . At one district meeting, students held signs that said “Grown-Ups Let Us Down” and “It's not a question of who beat whom, but who let it happen.”<sup>23</sup>

Another discouraging news story concerns an Asian fraternity at the University of California at Irvine (UCI—derisively called by some “University of Chinese Immigrants”). Some fraternity members created and circulated a video—using blackface.<sup>24</sup> While people attentive to the dynamics and manifestations of racism may harbor hopes that these incidents will diminish simply by the turnover of generations, these stories suggest instead the need to remain vigilant against complacency.

My reading in Asian American studies revealed the dilemmas and challenges of forging alliances to combat the persistent scourge of systemic racism in American culture and society. These challenges affect the possibilities of working both across ethnic

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<sup>23</sup> “Bullying against Asian students roils Philadelphia high school” Associated Press, January 22, 2010, [http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/education/2010-01-22-asian-bullying-philadelphia\\_N.htm](http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/education/2010-01-22-asian-bullying-philadelphia_N.htm).

<sup>24</sup> Tyler Kingkade, “UC Irvine Fraternity Lambda Theta Delta Apologizes For Blackface Video (UPDATE),” *The Huffington Post*, Posted: 04/26/2013, Updated: 05/02/2013, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/04/26/uc-irvine-blackface-video-fraternity\\_n\\_3162657.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/04/26/uc-irvine-blackface-video-fraternity_n_3162657.html).

lines—of various Asian ethnicities, whose ancestral roots may be in nations that were in historical conflict—and across racial lines, especially those between Asian Americans and African Americans. The question is whether people living different diasporic experiences can find common cause in building a society where all are treated justly.

“A lawyer’s either a social engineer or . . . a parasite on society.”<sup>25</sup> From this telling epigraph, we may get some sense of the origins of Frank H. Wu’s commitment to social justice. Though we learn something about his personal background, Wu’s *Yellow: Race in America Beyond Black and White* is the least autobiographical of the three books I will discuss. A law professor, Wu argues tightly and doggedly about the implications of historical anti-Asian racism in the United States. He details the rationale for the necessary alliances on policy issues that affect us all. Wu argues not only for recognizing that there is a shared experience of all Asian Americans, despite our variant histories both in our nations of origin and in the United States, but also for the justice values that should impel us to seek alliances with African Americans, Latino/as, and Native Americans in the persistent battle to end systemic racism altogether.

Yet Asian American narratives share a family resemblance across ethnicities, generations, time periods, and geographic regions; these Asian American experiences also distinguish us from other Americans. Individual Asian Americans usually have an anecdote about how they became Asian Americans. Something happened to them, or a series of events repeated themselves, that impressed on them that they are Asian Americans. They conclude that they may not be Asian Americans first and foremost, but neither are they Asian Americans last and least.<sup>26</sup>

Wu subtly teases out the complexities of alliances when it comes to fraught issues—for instance that of affirmative action. He points the seemingly divergent

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<sup>25</sup> Quotation of Charles Hamilton Houston, former dean, Howard University Law School, set as the epigraph to Frank H. Wu, “The Power of Coalitions: Why I Teach at Howard,” chap. 8 of *Yellow*, 301-42.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 312.

interests of Asian Americans on the one hand and African Americans, Hispanics, and Native Americans on the other when it comes to eliminating race as a criterion for university admissions. He exposes the internal contradictions of the concepts of color blindness and meritocracy. He calls on Asian Americans to avoid the hypocrisy of calling for the dismantling of affirmative action in university admissions, while yet seeking redress of the grievance of the corporate glass ceiling—that is, asking the state to discontinue one public policy of justice for other people of color, while asking the state to institute other public policies that promote justice in the interests of Asian Americans.<sup>27</sup> The issue of affirmative action in university admissions is further discussed in chapter 4, in relation to Asian Americans as the model minority.

And yet, even though he posits a commonly understood (if only vaguely described) Asian American experience, Wu still recognizes that “‘Asian American’ is an artificial concept,” and for this very reason “Asian Americans are a natural group for coalition movements. . . . Asian Americans must be united as Asian Americans, but we must be united with whites, African Americans, Latino/as, Native Americans, and others who have the same commitments and passions. Each of us has an individual role, but together we have the greater role in pursuit of racial justice.”<sup>28</sup>

We do well to be reminded, however, that cross-ethnic Asian alliances are not simple. In the blissful stereotype of all immigrant Americans ignoring history and

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 131-72, Wu’s chapter 4, entitled “Neither Black nor White: Affirmative Action and Asian Americans.”

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 314-15.

forgetting their past to create new “American” identities, we can ignore to our peril that some people will in fact hold on to the resentments of their ancestors.

Frank H. Wu and the two authors I will discuss shortly—Eric Liu and Helen Zia—married non-Asians. Yet, even as “marrying out” becomes more commonplace, we cannot assume that the hold of twentieth-century Asian geopolitics has completely lost its grip. Historical memory—in Asia, if not in the United States—will always remind us of the rape of Nanjing, or the Korean comfort women, or the desertion of the Japanese American internees by all other Asian American groups. Had I been alive during World War II, would I, like other Chinese residents of the United States, also have worn a button that said, “I am not a Jap”? Perhaps I would have, if the alternative was to be beaten up over mistaken identity. Japanese- and Chinese-Americans need to be honest and self-reflective about whether we harbor any feelings of superiority over Koreans, Vietnamese, Filipinos, or Hmong regarding culture, class, race, or the power of our nation of origin. One Dialog Partner has made a conscious decision to meet this challenge head on:

Now I should explain that as a political statement, I generally identify as Asian as compared to Chinese, Asian-American, or Chinese-American. I do so, because I want to stand in solidarity with other Asians and I believe in the necessity of overcoming the historical rifts between Asian nationalities that go back millennia, especially as a practicing Christian. For me, this is an intentional, political statement that I am making in support of building the Beloved Community of Jesus Christ and realizing the kingdom now, here on earth, in our lifetimes.

*Yvonne*

If we are to dismantle the white man’s gaze upon all of us as one vast lump of indistinguishable Asians, we will have to work with each other to make these alliances effective. Rather than merely forgetting the past, we might think to turn to the Christian

instruments of confession and forgiveness. We may need to come to grips, each of us, with how we may have let our parents' or grandparents' hatreds infect us—or not—and, by understanding our separate histories together in one conversation, arrive at a deeply rooted commitment to mutual understanding and allegiance. Some Chinese Americans, however, are not as willing as Yvonne to engage the struggle.

“I’d like to know: Who is Chinese American? Who is Asian American?” asks Eric Liu in *Accidental Asian: Notes of a Native Speaker*.<sup>29</sup> In a sensitive, nuanced reflection on his own life and sense of identity, Eric Liu offers a wide-ranging exploration of both Chinese identity and Asian American identity. With Hamlet-like questioning, he wonders how he is to participate in the pan-Asian American narrative when from his personal Chinese American specificity he can see that it is a narrative manufactured to achieve political ends: “I am not an Asian American activist; I just play one on TV. Even though I have a grasp of why this identity matters, I cannot escape the feeling that it is contrived and, in a more profound way, unnecessary.”<sup>30</sup>

Liu explores “Chineseness” and “Asianness” through heritage, food, customs, personality traits, and memory.

My wife and my mother both contend that I have a strong streak of Chinese in me, in my way of being. Carroll [his wife] cites the following as evidence: I keep things close; don’t like to have house guests; I worry about appearances; I am loyal to family; I am a responsible elder child; I work hard; I resist change in small things; I think Chinese food is superior. Mom locates my Chineseness elsewhere: in my respect for Chinese culture, in my sense of personal balance, in my understanding of obligation and duty.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Eric Liu, *The Accidental Asian: Notes of a Native Speaker* (New York: Random House, 1998), 187.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 184.

Liu's narrative, elegant and elegiac, is a series of rhetorical straw men pointing to ethnic identity as something so fluid that it is easily dispelled by counter examples. Liu's reality constantly reminds him that his own life does not bear out every stereotype in all its particulars. His book is absorbing to read, and a little frustrating.

Of course our hyphenated ethnic identities do not quite "fit." Of course we each have individual identities that may resist labels—perhaps in direct relation to how "American" (i.e., individualistic, independent, self-centered, or self-absorbed) we have grown to be. Of course easy definitions are now complicated by (1) waves of immigration occurring at different historical moments; (2) how our ethnicity is mediated by social class—both that of our immigrant forebears and that which we ourselves have entered; and, not least, (3) the degree of balance our parents chose to share with us between holding on to the cultural norms of our ethnicity of origin and the requirements of the American environment in which we have had to make our way.

My foundational principle of ethnic identity—applicable only to myself, and not something I seek to impose on others—is that we each get to hyphenate the two terms—"Asian" and "American"—in any way we choose. In this, I am at one with Eric Liu's perspective. In chapter 4 I take theologian Jonathan Tan to task for criticizing Liu on this point, but I can also see how frustrating some might find Liu's perhaps overly nuanced ambiguity, which may be a way of avoiding a commitment to dismantle racism, which he undoubtedly recognizes as present, though perhaps not as immediate a threat to his own life and well-being as it is to those Asians without his education and class privilege. Liu reports meeting with Shawn Wong, a novelist and member of the first wave of 1970s

Asian American activism in the San Francisco Bay Area. Wong “listens patiently” to

Liu’s “paean to race transcendence,” and then warns him “gently, not to forget history.”

By which he means Asian American history: the trials of people before my time, whose estrangement from the mainstream years ago made possible my entry into the mainstream today. I realize, yes, I should know better the origins of my own situation. And I think, here in this narrative is a source of belonging. But then I wonder: Should I stop with Asian American stories? Should I even begin there?<sup>32</sup>

Once again, I hear Hamlet-like hesitations to address the main question: will we who notice, describe, and suffer from (to greatly varying degrees, to be sure) the well-established patterns of anti-Asian racism act in an intentional and systematic way to bring these patterns to an end? Or will we simply negotiate for ourselves large-enough havens of physical and psychic safety, confident that our privilege and class will protect us from all severe storms, even while these same storms may devastate the lives of those who share our skin color and ethnic appearance but do not have the same armor and refuge? As one of the Dialog Partners reported, “My present life is one where I am and do primarily what I/we ‘want’ to do which limits my involvement in scenarios where I may be exposed to systemic racism.”<sup>33</sup>

While my bottom-line principle of individual determination of how the hyphen works for each of us would have me defend Liu’s choices and those of the Dialog Partner just quoted, and while our social locations may be so similar as to be indistinguishable, spiritual and faith commitments oriented toward justice and reconciliation might well lead one to follow different paths. But none of us can delude ourselves into thinking that

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 153-54.

<sup>33</sup> Ellen, e-mail message to author, December 30, 2013.



building bridges and alliances will be easy. To fit into more recognizable patterns of justice-seeking, some might ask us to choose identities that are not our own:

Rose was black, and Julie was white. One day we stood in the school yard, talking about the civil rights movement swirling around us, about cities engulfed in flames and the dreams for justice and equality that burned in each of us.

As I offered my thoughts, Rose abruptly turned to me and said, “Helen, you’ve got to decide if you’re black or white.”<sup>34</sup>

Helen Zia, a journalist of talent and power, describes in vivid detail both the achievements and the disappointments of cross-boundary alliances. As an Asian American journalist living in Detroit at the time of the Vincent Chin murder, she provides a full, nuanced account of this important moment in recent Asian American historical consciousness. Vincent Chin was clubbed to death by two laid-off white autoworkers in Detroit in 1982. A Chinese American celebrating his bachelor party that evening, Chin was taken by his assailants to be Japanese. They blamed him for the Japanese automobile industry’s outperforming its American competitors, thus costing them their jobs.

The loss of Vincent Chin’s life was tragic, and the absurdity of the light sentence was a government-inflicted wound for all Asian Americans. Yet, it was beginning to seem to me, this was always going to be one of the tattered objects we would draw out of our precious box of oppressive memories, as if we could find no more recent grievances to complain about. Zia’s extensive narrative of the Chin murder, set alongside her equally detailed accounts of the black-on-Asian violence in New York City (1988, 1990) and the post-Rodney King riots and mayhem in Los Angeles that destroyed the lives and livelihoods of many Korean small business owners (1992)—offers a detailed yet wide-

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<sup>34</sup> Helen Zia, *Asian American Dreams: The Emergence of an American People* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2000), 4.

angle picture of how inter-racial resentment plays itself out in our society, and what we are up against if we are going to form inter-racial alliances to dismantle all racist structures and interpersonal dynamics. We will all have to do better jobs of knowing each other's histories and contexts if we are going to forge effective partnerships.

One thing I learned from Zia's account of the post-Rodney King unrest in Los Angeles was that there were in fact people who could see beyond the mindless violence of the moment and had begun to look for solutions. The story she tells of the Black-Korean Alliance (BKA) that formed in 1986 with the assistance of the Los Angeles County Human Relations Commission is not one I had heard before. Perhaps it was too "in-the-weeds," (or too hopeful), to report in the mainstream press beside the more colorful stories of animosity and mayhem. And yet the accumulated violence between Korean grocers and the South Central Los Angeles black community—black customers shot in Korean stores, Koreans murdered in revenge—contributed to the sense that the problems between the two groups were intractable, even before the April 29, 1992 jury verdict acquitting the white police officers of assault on Rodney King.

Under continuous pressure from events, and after six years of meetings, and before April 29, 1992, the Black-Korean Alliance disbanded.<sup>35</sup> The story of *Sa-i-gu* (4-2-9 in Korean), along with its precursors and its aftermath, tells us just how hard it is to form alliances amid the swirl of dynamic animosities that regularly express themselves in violent actions, and it shows us as well that the insight and good will necessary to make the attempt in spite of the odds are never completely absent.

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 166-94, chapter 7, "Lost and Found in L.A.," of *Asian American Dreams*.

As both the nineteenth- and twentieth-century narratives of Chinese and Asian inter-ethnic relations demonstrate, labor exploitation and competitive economics in general are very often at the heart of racial oppression. The history of Asian Americans repeatedly demonstrates that the need for cheap labor, and setting different groups against each other to drive down the cost of labor, is a principle that drives inter-racial tension and violence, not to mention the fact that it lies at the core of all empire-building. Labor, its organization, exploitation, and displacement by those in power lies at the heart of why forming inter-ethnic and especially inter-racial coalitions can be so difficult.

Perhaps the most vivid emblem for the link between labor and inter-ethnic tension is the anti-Asian racism of Samuel Gompers. At least in the American history I learned as a child (perhaps this has been corrected in today's American history books), Gompers was presented as an American hero, another champion in the continuous struggle to spread rights and prosperity in the ever-forward march that is the American narrative of progress. I do not remember those triumphal high school texts mentioning Gompers's dogged opposition to including Asian Americans in the movement to organize labor. Gompers' hypocrisy on the issue made learning this bit of history even more chilling:

Gompers was not like other anti-Asian agitators, however, who were anti-Asian with no compunction about the matter. He wanted to be known as open minded. He insisted that he had no grudge against Asian immigrants but was acting as he did because of his experiences and observations. He said in his autobiography, "it is my desire to state emphatically that I have no prejudice against the Chinese people" but only "profound respect for the Chinese nation." He said in the very next paragraph, "I have always opposed Chinese immigration not only because of the effect of Chinese standards of life and work but because of the racial problem created when Chinese and white workers were brought into the close contact of living and working side by side." These contradictory comments were not exceptional. He had said earlier that once the Chinaman comes, he has either dominated or been driven out, for "the Chinaman is a cheap man." He then added, as if he had regrets for his hatred, "the American people do not object to the Chinese because they are Chinese," but because

of all the ills they would bring to the country. (He had the same views toward all other Asian workers as well, especially Japanese and Korean.)<sup>36</sup>

Faced with such egregious and not-so-distant examples, each of us must decide how we will negotiate the similarities and differences of our experience of anti-Asian racism with the experiences of African-, Hispanic-, and Native-Americans. One Dialog Partner has observed not just the possibility but the reality of inter-ethnic alliances:

**I think that immigrant and refugee communities . . . are learning that it is better and more powerful to align themselves with like immigrant and refugee communities than to retain the historical, generational animosities against other tribes or nationalities. Those ancient feuds simply do not serve us in the vast American country and culture where resources are often withheld for myriad reasons from immigrant and refugee communities, from communities of color. Perhaps it is a bit of the trope of a common enemy.**

*Yvonne*

Seen theologically, racism is a clever tool of the devil, perhaps his most diabolical. It can capture us, its victims, and make some of us dance to its tune, even as we outwardly commit ourselves to the project of dismantling it. If we intend to be faithful and effective adversaries of racism, as part of fulfilling our Baptismal Covenant, we will have to do the personal, associational, and political work all at the same time.

The decision to take up the challenge is necessarily an individual one; we each choose to what degree we will be active against injustice. Perhaps the only differences among Frank H. Wu, Eric Liu, and Helen Zia (and myself) are those of personality. Each of us seems to have been raised in families from the educated middle class of mid-twentieth-century China, and are now bona fide members of the American intelligentsia. In class, educational level, and professional achievement we are more similar than

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<sup>36</sup> Wu, *Yellow*, 15. See also Zia, *Asian American Dreams*, 35-38; and Takaki, *Strangers*, 199-200.

different. Though we may recognize the danger of the trope of the Asian as model minority, we each exemplify it to some degree and show that it is not completely a myth.

And yet it is Liu, the one most directly involved in American politics (as a speechwriter for President Clinton), who hesitates the most to be aggrieved at the state of anti-Asian racism in the United States, and to take on the activist's role. And it is Zia—perhaps because, as a lesbian, she sees more readily the interlocking of oppressions along multiple lines of race, gender, and sexuality—who offers us the most concrete reporting on how alliances are formed and dissolved under great stress of inter-racial antagonism.

With all the other priorities facing the United States in the second decade of the twenty-first century, it remains to be seen how urgent the issues of anti-Asian racism will be in the public consciousness. Despite the efforts of writers like Wu and Zia to get us all to see issues of racism “beyond black and white,” the US population and government may well turn their attention first to Hispanic/Latino and Muslim/Arab issues before those of Asian Americans. One hot political, economic, or military crisis with either the People's Republic of China or North Korea could—if history teaches us anything—change that calculus in an instant. As one Dialog Partner volunteered,

**As a Chinese American, I bridge two worlds and am able to see the institutional and personal racism that the majority will not acknowledge. I predict that there will be a rise of these types of racist incidents as the numbers of immigrant Chinese increase and as the rise of the Chinese economy in Asia becomes more threatening to American economic interests.**

*Frances*

At least one of the Dialog Partners sees, as I do, that Chinese Americans—“Asians as perpetual foreigners”—will somehow always be associated with, and implicated in, Euro-Americans' perceptions of the People's Republic of China. She also notices the role

played by global economics and politics in how American minority groups are treated.<sup>37</sup>

Historian Ellen D. Wu also finds that to be true, specifically in relation to use of the model minority trope in American racial discourse:

National conversations about the model minority demonstrate that Asian American's social standing remains inextricably bound to global forces; what has changed over time is that overseas economic competition has eclipsed geopolitical relations as the primary determining factor. Put bluntly, Americans' anxieties about stateside Asians are inseparable from qualms about marketplace rivalries between the United States and the established and emerging Pacific Rim powerhouses: Japan, the "Four Tigers" (Hong Kong, South Korea, Singapore, and Taiwan), Vietnam, India, and China.<sup>38</sup>

We now turn our attention more directly to the Dialog Partners, as I try to describe their voyages to the United States, the Episcopal Church, and Christian faith.

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<sup>37</sup> For a synopsis of how a clash between the People's Republic of China and the U.S. might unfold, see Hugh White, "Sharing Power with China," *New York Times*, March 19, 2014, [http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/20/opinion/sharing-power-with-china.html?ref=opinion&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/20/opinion/sharing-power-with-china.html?ref=opinion&_r=0). Though this op-ed writer frames the issue as a matter of formal US-China foreign relations, history and personal experience have shown that there will be repercussions for ordinary Americans of Chinese and Asian descent should those foreign relations become more tense than they are at present.

<sup>38</sup> Ellen D. Wu, *The Color of Success: Asian Americans and the Origins of the Model Minority* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 253.

### Chapter 3

#### **Voyages: The Chinese American Dialog Partners in the Episcopal Church**

The Dialog Partners are all Chinese Americans, and all active to some degree in the Episcopal Church. The stories of their journeys both geographically to the United States and spiritually to the Episcopal Church, will show how these two journeys were related, if at all. We will learn what attracts them to this particular faith tradition. We have already seen that for the most part they do not feel (nor see the necessity to feel) any particular resonance between the Episcopal Church and their Chinese American identities. Finally, we will get a glimpse of their own understandings of their faith.

The relationships between religion and identity seems to be a focal theme of much of the writing on Asian American religion—which would not be surprising, since that writing seems to have been done primarily by sociologists.<sup>1</sup> As noted in the Introduction, I am not a trained social scientist of any sort. My interests in the Dialog Partners arise from my social location as a fellow Chinese American who is also an Episcopal priest—and therefore as a theologian, pastor, and congregational leader. Although I am interested in questions of ethnic identity, my primary interest was how the Dialog Partners experience the church denomination we all share in common.

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Tony Carnes and Fenggang Yang, eds., *Asian American Religions: The Making and Remaking of Borders and Boundaries* (New York: New York University Press, 2004), especially chapters 1 and 8; Pyong Gap Min and Jung Ha Kim, eds., *Religions in Asian America: Building Faith Communities* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002), especially chapters 1 and 3; and Fenggang Yang, *Chinese Christians in America: Conversions, Assimilation, and Adhesive Identities* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999).

### *Voyages to the United States and the Episcopal Church*

As Episcopalians/Anglicans, the Dialog Partners and I are neither typical Chinese Americans nor typical Chinese American Christians. According to a survey published in 2012 by the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, *Asian Americans: A Mosaic of Faiths*, Christianity is the largest religious affiliation (42%) among Asian Americans in general, with “unaffiliated” being the second largest (26%). Among Chinese Americans, however, the proportions are decidedly reversed: 31% of Chinese Americans identify as Christian, while 52% are unaffiliated—the largest proportion of the religiously unaffiliated among all Asian American groups. Of the 31% of Chinese Americans who identify as Christian, 22% identify as Protestant and 8% identify as Roman Catholic. Of the 22% who identify as Protestant, 13% identify as evangelical and 9% identify as mainline.

Breaking the picture down further to individual Protestant denominations, among all US Asians and among Chinese in particular, Presbyterian, Baptist, and nondenominational are the affiliations with the largest percentage of adherents (US Asians: Presbyterian—19%, Baptist—18%, nondenominational 14%; US Chinese: Presbyterian—10%, Baptist—15%, nondenominational—14%). Episcopal and Disciples of Christ are among the affiliations with the lowest percentage of adherents, both among US Asians and US Chinese (US Asians: Episcopal—3%, Disciples of Christ—1%; US Chinese: Episcopal—2%, Disciples of Christ—2%).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Pew Research Center’s Forum on Religion & Public Life, *Asian Americans: A Mosaic of Faiths*, July 19, 2012, <http://www.pewforum.org/Asian-Americans-A-Mosaic-of-Faiths.aspx>, 40,43.



To reflect upon the experience of Chinese American Episcopalians, then, is to reflect upon a tiny minority (3% of all Chinese American Protestants) of a larger minority (Chinese Christians being outnumbered by religiously unaffiliated Chinese Americans<sup>3</sup>) of a small but growing ethnic minority in a United States that grows increasingly diverse.

Of the six Dialog Partners, two were born in the United States, the other four in China or in the Asian Chinese diaspora. Yet five of the six took part in their families' immigration experience, as one American-born person returned to China with his family and came back to the United States to attend college. All but one of the six immigration experiences took place after the Immigration Act of 1965, which re-opened US borders to Asian immigrants after decades of legislated exclusion (see chapter 2, especially Table 1). The reasons given for immigration were generally for a specific employment offer or for economic opportunity more generally, though one ("The reason was for a better life") could be interpreted as possibly political.

The families of three of the six Dialog Partners were exposed to Anglicanism prior to immigration—one (Frances) as a result of having gone to Anglican school in Hong Kong as a child, and two (the brother and sister William and Ellen) have Anglican/Episcopal roots extending back several generations, to a nineteenth-century ancestor who was sent to the United States in the 1850s for seminary training, and ordained in the Episcopal Church when he returned to China. Yvonne, though she does

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<sup>3</sup> The pattern of Chinese American Christians being outnumbered by those claiming no affiliation seems to be consistent over recent decades. Fenggang Yang notes that "a *Los Angeles Times* poll in 1997 reports that 44 percent of Chinese Americans in southern California claim no religion, 32 percent are Christian (including 6 percent Catholics)." See Fenggang Yang, "Religious Diversity among the Chinese in America," in Min and Kim, *Religions in Asian America*, 71.

not specifically cite Anglicanism, also reports ancestral conversion to Christianity in China. Although five of the six dialog partners are married to Euro-Americans (one has only recently become engaged), only one of them (Nora) reports that she came to the Episcopal Church influenced by the spouse's Euro-American family.

Two Dialog Partners (Charles and Yvonne) report coming to the Episcopal Church after having been raised in other Protestant denominations. Yvonne reports an adult discovery of the Episcopal Church through her child's attendance at an Episcopal school, after a period of being unchurched. Nora's immediate reason to join the Episcopal Church was also related to her children—the need to have them baptized, at her in-laws' request. Ellen reports regular church attendance after the birth of a child. The journeys to the Episcopal Church for Charles, Yvonne, and Nora, resemble that of other Americans who choose among different Christian traditions, including the one in which they were raised, based on various factors they find important to them as adults.

The three Dialog Partners reporting exposure to the Anglican tradition prior to immigration, name Hong Kong—until 1997 a British colony—as their Chinese place of origin. Although sociologist Fenggang Yang bases his insights into Chinese American Christianity on an in-depth study of an evangelical ethnic congregation in Washington, D.C., some of his findings might possibly be applied to these Chinese American Episcopalians. He offers a typology of conversion experiences based on three factors: “(1) pre-immigration experiences, (2) post-immigration experiences, and (3) Christian socialization during childhood.” He further asserts that

among the mainland-born sojourners who fled to Hong Kong or Taiwan in the 1940s and 1950s, both pre-immigration experiences in Asia and post-immigration

experiences in America are important for their conversion. A few of these people were born into Christian families or received baptism as children; however, their pre-immigration and post-immigration experiences often intensified their religiosity. In comparison, among the children's generation of the sojourners who grew up in Taiwan and Hong Kong [i.e., the experience, more or less, of Ellen, William, and Frances], more people had Christian socialization in their childhood. Because these people grew up in a time of social stability and economic boom in Taiwan and Hong Kong, pre-immigration experiences were usually not critical in their conversion. However, many people had life-changing experiences as foreign students or immigrants in the United States.<sup>4</sup>

For people who have immigrated directly to the United States from the People's Republic of China, the journey to church might have been quite different. Yang claims, for those in the congregation under his study:

For people from the PRC and Indochina, there was almost no Christian socialization. In mainland China under the Communist rule, for several decades Christian churches were closed. Christian believers were persecuted, and the compulsory education tightly controlled by the Chinese Communist Party indoctrinated students with materialism, scientism, and atheism. However, experiences of political catastrophes and social turmoil prepared many of them for religious conversion. Experiences in America as foreign students or immigrants further intensified their desire for a religion.<sup>5</sup>

Yang presents several poignant testimonies in his research that point to the deep existential yearnings that might lead a recent (i.e., post-1965) Chinese immigrant to seek solace in the Christian faith. For many, according to Yang, simply seek—after decades and generations of continuous upheaval in the land of origin—something called “home.”

Because of the hardship of settling down anywhere in the world, most sojourners<sup>6</sup> have a deep sense of homelessness, and consequently they seek permanence or eternity in the heavenly world promised by Christianity. A man I met

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<sup>4</sup> Yang, *Chinese Christians in America*, 74-75.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 75.

<sup>6</sup> As Yang defines them, “sojourners” are those “who were born in mainland China and fled to Taiwan or Hong Kong before coming to America.” These are distinguished from four other groups: (2) “their children’s generation who were born or grew up in Taiwan or Hong Kong; (3) refugees from Indo-Chinese countries; (4) mainland Chinese from the PRC; and (5) the American-born Chinese (ABC) and American-raised Chinese (ARC).” This typology describes the particular Washington, D.C., Chinese congregation that Yang has studied, but he finds it applies to “Chinese new immigrants overall.” Yang, *Chinese Christians in America*, 72.

in Boston expressed this feeling movingly. He was born in Guangdong, went to Taiwan, and came to the United States to study mathematics. While attending college he converted to Christianity, then dedicated himself to the ministry and entered a seminary. Upon graduation from a seminary he went to a Southeast Asian country to teach theology. However, he did not feel at home there, so he moved to Hong Kong. After several years in Hong Kong he still did not feel at home, so he came back to the United States and became a professor in a mainline seminary. He was longing to go to his ancestral homeland and work in mainland China. However, he realized that after so many years away from China, he probably would not be able to find the sense of home in China either. In addition, Christians are often persecuted in the PRC. “The only permanent home,” he concluded with a deep breath, “is in the kingdom of God.”<sup>7</sup>

In response to the question of what continues to attract the Dialog Partners to the Episcopal Church, the need to assuage a sense of homelessness or rootlessness does not arise, however. The survey research seems to corroborate this as a relative characteristic of Chinese who join mainline denominations. According to the Pew Research Center, Asian American evangelicals and mainline Protestants offer different answers to the question, “Overall, do you think of yourself to be a typical American or very different from a typical American?” Forty-one percent of all Protestants answer “typical,” while 50% answer “very different.” For evangelical Protestants the breakdown is less typical (36%) and more different (57%), while for mainline Protestants the breakdown is more typical (48%) and less different (41%).<sup>8</sup> Asian American mainline Protestants consider themselves more typically American than Asian Americans overall, and even more typical than Asian American evangelicals. It is possible, then, that the Dialog Partners and I have found ourselves more “at home” in the United States than others, even if not all of us are American-born.

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 79-80.

<sup>8</sup> Pew Research Center, *The Rise of Asian Americans*, updated edition April 4, 2013, <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/files/2013/04/Asian-Americans-new-full-report-04-2013.pdf>, 190.

The most consistent reason that the Dialog Partners give for their affinity for the Episcopal Church is its openness to differing views. The familiar liturgy was named by three of the six, and social justice or progressive political and social views was named by two (though for a third, given what I know from Facebook of her commitments both in the church and in society at large, not naming social justice may have been an oversight—she is public, passionate, and active in her social justice commitments). The Episcopal Church’s openness and tolerance about religious matters was expressed in various ways: “Tolerant, open-minded and open-hearted, progressive, not taking the Bible literally, be kind to others as well as to oneself, being a good stewardess to our planet...these are the few characteristics of the Episcopal Church that keep me committed” (Nora); “I like that we can (or at least should be able to) disagree and co-exist” (Frances); “the freedom to disagree with a lot of what other Christians proclaim” (William). The attraction to openness and progressive views seem to place the Dialog Partners in the minority of Asian American Christians. Tony Carnes and Fenggang Yang tell us that “For most Asian American religious adherents, religion means conservative religion. Almost every scholar in this book has found this phenomenon.”<sup>9</sup>

Nora went further than the others in relating this perceived tolerance, openness, and flexibility of the Episcopal Church to her sense of Chinese identity, when she linked it with what she sees as a Chinese cultural trait of humility:

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<sup>9</sup> Tony Carnes and Fenggang Yang, “Introduction,” in *Asian American Religions*, 7.

I think the emphasis on humility in the Chinese culture is also present in the Episcopal Church. . . . Episcopalians don't seem to claim that our Church is better than everybody else's. Being humble allow us to embrace different religions, different thoughts, and people who are different from ourselves.

*Nora*

There are some Christians, certainly, who understand the Episcopal Church's flexibility and tolerance of difference as misguided, as not showing a strong core of belief, as caving in to the shifting winds of culture, as lacking theological and moral certainty. Over the last two or three decades, the Episcopal Church has publicly struggled to locate a center of authority and a defining orthodoxy (or lack thereof), particularly around issues of sexuality and the ordained ministry of women.<sup>10</sup> Some Episcopalians, like the Dialog Partners and I, appreciate our church's lack of rigidity and its openness to diverse views; some others, including many global Anglicans, clearly do not.

Fenggang Yang attributes the attraction of Chinese American Christians to the evangelical tradition to a desire for certainty. In doing so, he first looks at other possible reasons why Chinese people might find their way to Christianity, why "Chinese convert to evangelical Christianity."<sup>11</sup> He dismisses several plausible presumptive arguments. Against the idea that people might join the church without genuine conversion so as to gain material advantages (one of the Dialog Partners jokingly referred to his family's becoming Anglican using the well-known phrase "rice-bowl Christian"), Yang notes that

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<sup>10</sup> The literature on the Episcopal/Anglican controversy surrounding lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) issues is voluminous. Two entry points among the many that could be suggested are Caroline J. Addington Hall, *A Thorn in the Flesh: How Gay Sexuality Is Changing the Episcopal Church* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2013), and Miranda K. Hassett, *Anglican Communion in Crisis: How Episcopal Dissidents and Their African Allies Are Reshaping Anglicanism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007). For a sense of how a problematic global Anglican conversation is unfolding, see Terry Brown, ed., *Other Voices, Other Worlds: The Global Church Speaks Out on Homosexuality* (New York: Church Publishing, 2006).

<sup>11</sup> Yang, *Chinese Christians in America*, 89-94.

the Washington, D.C. evangelical church he studied does not provide social services such as English language classes or job referral, placing an exclusive emphasis on evangelism instead. He also notes that most church members are well-educated professionals in middle-class suburbs, and do not need the church to provide material services or benefits.

Yang also counters the idea that Chinese Americans claim Christian faith so as to grow more like non-Asian Americans, to assimilate to the majority of Americans who claim to adhere to one form of Christian faith or another. He points out that, for highly educated Chinese Americans, claiming no faith would be as good a choice as joining a church, as this segment of the population, the so-called “nones,” has been growing, and, as Pew tells us about Chinese Americans, outnumber those who identify as Christian.

In contemporary American society it is no longer necessary to have religion. Nonreligious persons are accepted, especially in professional working environments, and religious expression is discouraged in the highly secularized, private, high-tech companies or government offices in which many Chinese work in the Washington, D.C., area. Nonetheless, these professional Chinese immigrants have converted to conservative Christianity despite risking derision from colleagues.<sup>12</sup>

Or, Yang argues, if assimilation is the motive, joining a non-ethnic church closer to their own neighborhoods, or joining a mainline denominational church would be reasonable alternatives, as the Chinese Americans at this particular church have relatively high socioeconomic status, speak fluent English, and live in non-ethnic racially mixed suburbs. Yet, instead, “Chinese Christians have chosen evangelical or fundamentalist Christianity and subsequently have formed nondenominational ethnic churches.”<sup>13</sup>

Yang also denies that “ethnic-group belonging” could be a motivation for joining an ethnic, nondenominational evangelical church.

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 90.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 91.

Unlike the Korean immigrant community in which the Korean church has been the most well-established social, cultural, and educational center, Chinese immigrants have had more numerous and diverse kinds of ethnic organizations and associations available to them. . . . There are also traditional Chinese religious groups, such as Buddhist temples and semi-religious *qigong* (meditation) associations. To find some ethnic group to join is not hard for new Chinese immigrants. They do not have to go to a church simply for the purpose of their ethnic needs.<sup>14</sup>

Yang argues instead that Chinese immigrants have converted to evangelical Christianity because of the need for certainty, after both living through the turmoil of modern China, including the ideological collapse of Maoist Communism, and also encountering the challenges of Western modernity, which “tends to relativize and trivialize conventional religious beliefs. . . . For new Chinese immigrants, both pre-migration traumas and post-migration uncertainties in modern American society fortify their desire for absoluteness and certainty.”<sup>15</sup>

Clearly, this does not seem to be the case with the Episcopalian Dialog Partners. They are not only comfortable with the Episcopal Church’s willingness to wrestle openly and publicly with ambiguity, uncertainty, and lack of complete agreement—they cite this diversity of judgment and belief as a positive attraction. It should be remembered that five of the six Dialog Partners were themselves part of the immigrant experience, and not second- or later-generation American-born Chinese. I did not ask those who immigrated whether they had personal experience of the historical traumas of Asian Chinese history, particularly in the People’s Republic of China. Given the dates of their immigration (i.e., mostly post-1965), however, one can surmise that they were not untouched by the events

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 91.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 93-94.



of history; and yet any experience of historical trauma does not seem to have led them to desire certainty in the way that Yang describes for evangelicals.

Why, then, are the Dialog Partners attracted to flexibility and tolerance, in contrast to Yang's assertions of Chinese American Christians' attraction to "the sole and absolute truth [that] can only be found in the inerrant Bible"?<sup>16</sup> In the absence of further research, might one speculate that one's confidence stemming from a more successful psychological integration with American society (recalling that mainline Protestant Asian Americans perceive themselves as more typically American than evangelical Asian American Protestants) empowers one's ability then to entertain and tolerate questions, doubts, ambiguities, and disagreements? Some people might sense that diversity of outlook and belief is closer to the perceived reality of human beings than uniformity across an entire community or society, and wish to engage that reality. If evangelical Asian Americans feel less typically "American," perhaps a continuing and gnawing sense of alienation from American society, along with a vividly remembered sense of dislocation from a tumultuous China or Asia, increases the need for the certitudes and absolutes that evangelical Christianity (according to Yang) provides.

However reasonable Yang's arguments for Chinese immigrants seeking the certainties of evangelical Christianity, it could just as plausibly be asked whether having experienced the rigidity of Communist thought control, having seen the rise and collapse of several political and cultural ideologies in the space of a lifetime, some people might relish not just the freedom but also the responsibility and joy of grappling with the

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 94.

tensions of differing thought systems, doctrines, and social beliefs in a complex, post-modern world. One Dialog Partner stated, “I like that it is a church that challenges us to find the living Christ in this fast changing world.”<sup>17</sup>

It should be noted here that Yang’s attention to evangelical Christianity among Chinese Americans is based both on a focus on Chinese *congregations* (i.e., not on Chinese Christian individuals who find themselves in non-ethnic congregations) and on data from the 1990s.<sup>18</sup> While evangelical Christianity may still be the more numerous mode of Christian discipleship—especially when looking at newer Chinese immigrants—my speculations on the differences between Yang’s evangelicals and the Episcopalian Dialog Partners are also complicated by the fact that he is looking at congregations and I am looking at individuals.

When asked how they might persuade other Chinese Americans to consider the Episcopal Church, the Dialog Partners’ responses again centered on themes of openness and tolerance for difference of opinion and belief, for conflict, and for imperfection. As impediments, they named the Anglican/Episcopal history of whiteness and class privilege, as well as a potential lack of welcome (“it takes a long time to get to know

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<sup>17</sup> Frances, e-mail message to author, June 30, 2013.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Yang, *Chinese Christians in America*, 7: “In 1996 there were 158 Chinese churches in the San Francisco and Bay area. Among them, 10 were Presbyterian (PCUSA), 7 United Methodist, 6 Episcopal, 5 American Baptist, and 4 Lutheran (Missouri Synod). However, a great number of new churches established by Chinese immigrants are independent, and those new churches that do affiliate with American denominations tend to favor theologically conservative ones [citations provided from literature dated 1996]. Nationally, about half of all Chinese churches have no affiliation with American denominations [citation to 1995 source]. Furthermore, denominational churches tend to maintain a high degree of independence. The denominations most attractive to Chinese Christians are conservative in theology and less centralized in organization. The largest group of Chinese churches belongs to the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), which claimed about 150 Chinese churches in 1995. The second largest is the Christian and Missionary Alliance (C&MA) with about 60 Chinese churches in the United States.”

people”), particularly to people of color: “Depending on ‘how’ Chinese the person is they may feel a little isolated;”<sup>19</sup> “Persons of color would find it a very white church.”<sup>20</sup>

And yet, there were attestations that the church is “welcoming, respectful and affirming to all in their journey of faith,”<sup>21</sup> that “there is room for all.”<sup>22</sup> One must always speculate whether such affirmations may be more aspirational rather than based on the Episcopal Church’s present reality, and be attentive to how much the Episcopal Church needs to continue the work of overcoming its reputation as exclusive and elitist.

### *Voyages in Faith*

I asked the Dialog Partners about any theological concepts (examples of theological concepts given in the question were “salvation, sin, forgiveness, eternal life, etc.”) and how they understood the presence of God in their lives. Their responses should be kept in mind as a backdrop for reading the next chapter, where I engage the voices of Chinese American theologians. Two themes emerged with overwhelming clarity from the Dialog Partners’ collective responses: gratitude (or thankfulness) and forgiveness. If these six Chinese American people are in any way typical Chinese Episcopalians, our denomination can take some pride in developing thoughtful, theologically literate Christian people. I cannot know, of course, how typical they are in fact.

Thankfulness (or gratitude) was discussed at some length by several Dialog Partners. One of them described a horrific personal ordeal experienced by her and her husband, and the outpouring of concrete support from friends caused her to compare her

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<sup>19</sup> Ellen, e-mail message to author, June 30, 2013.

<sup>20</sup> Frances, e-mail message to author, June 30, 2013.

<sup>21</sup> Charles, e-mail message to author, February 12, 2014.

<sup>22</sup> William, e-mail message to author, June 27, 2013.

life with that of George Bailey in the film “It’s a Wonderful Life.” “What I have learned,” she said, “is the presence of God in the world and in our lives is through the organic bonds of loving relationships—to each other, to the earth, and it is through those acts that affirm those bonds that will bring forth the Kingdom on earth.” She says she asks the same three questions of every sermon (“What has God gifted to me?” “Where is God moving me to act?” and “What does God require of me now?”), and states:

The three questions remind me that (1) I am a loved child of God. It makes me grateful and energizes me from the point of view of gratitude and strength. (2) It reminds me that I personally am God’s instrument in the world. (3) Question 3 reminds me that my life belongs to God—it gives me something to ponder after the sermon.

*Frances*

As will be seen in chapter 5, another Dialog Partner, Ellen, cites as the primary reason for participating in her ministries (while denying that they *are* ministries) her sense of giving back—that is, her sense of abundance and gratitude. I wonder if the power of thankfulness might be underestimated not just as an obligation of but as an important impetus to Christian faith, and I wonder if this might not be a dynamic among Chinese Americans deserving further inquiry. Stephen Platten reminds us that thankfulness is one of the most important “moods” and patterns of Christian worship—not just in the communion portion of the Sunday eucharistic service (and of course “eucharist” means “thanksgiving,”) but in the stories we hear from Scripture as well.<sup>23</sup> Platten asserts that “living eucharistic lives . . . must be rooted in the sacrament of the

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<sup>23</sup> Stephen Platten, “Thanksgiving,” chapter 1 in *Liturgical Spirituality*, ed. Stephen Burns (New York: Seabury, 2012), 6-23.

eucharist itself. . . . It is the place where we see, through Christ's own sacrifice, how better to embrace life as gift and to offer ourselves in grace-filled lives.<sup>24</sup>

The other theological theme, mentioned less often but by more than one person, was forgiveness. As one Dialog Partner stated: "I have learned through church as a learning community that we are all sinners, we are all human. It's a great place to practice forgiveness."<sup>25</sup>

Another Dialog Partner explicated the personal efficacy of forgiveness of oneself and others:

I find myself thinking about sin and forgiveness often. I think humans are full of flaws. We have to be mindful of our actions and words in order to be less sinful. I believe in forgiveness: forgiving myself and forgiving others. When I forgive myself I feel that I can move on and make room to do good; when I dwell in the things I have done wrong I am more negative and angry, and therefore treat those around me not as kindly as I'd wanted to. As for forgiving others, so far, I am glad that I've forgiven them and gave them a second chance. People make mistakes. It is important not to judge and dismiss them base on a few mistakes.

*Nora*

A third Dialog Partner connected the theme of forgiveness with a sense of Chinese identity:

Forgiveness is a theme that has particular resonance for me. I think for me, the idea that I am forgiven, that whatever wrongs I have thought or done, they are forgiven and I am forgiven, is overwhelmingly powerful and life-giving. As a personality, one who has been raised in a Chinese family to be dutiful and filial, to own my responsibilities, I find myself the carrier of a lot of guilt over my shortcomings and the things I've done. . . . For me, forgiveness trumps guilt and shame. Forgiveness wipes out guilt and shame and creates a new slate on which God, the creator, can write a new Me into being.

*Yvonne*

It is beyond the scope of this thesis to examine whether Chinese culture is any more shame-based than any other, and if therefore forgiveness carries added resonance. I

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>25</sup> Frances, e-mail message to author, February 13, 2014.

believe some might argue that shame is prominent in our family dynamics.<sup>26</sup> If so, then might it be an important subject for Chinese American theologians to explore, as a matter of practical theology? What role might Christian forgiveness—both of self and other—play in helping to heal developmental and cultural wounds? It is interesting that another Dialog Partner, who describes himself as having come to the Episcopal Church from “a more conservative, confessional church,” recognizes that his previous theological concerns had been “more focused on sin/salvation/repentance/eternal life,” whereas now it was “more focused on God’s empowering love, desire for us to live full and grace-filled lives, being grateful and being empowered by gratefulness.”<sup>27</sup> If we assume that the Dialog Partners, being mostly of the boomer generation, and having spent at least part of their lives in Asia, have witnessed at least some measure of historical evil, how might one offer a pastoral exploration of sin, repentance, and forgiveness through their personal experiences? Only one Dialog Partner referenced the standard theodicy question (“Sometimes I wonder where God is with all the terrible things happening in the world”),<sup>28</sup> but that might also be a fruitful direction for a future group pastoral exploration, given the social locations and historical experiences of the Dialog Partners and myself.

Having seen the practical bent of the theological concerns expressed by the Dialog Partners, let us now turn to the topics that interest Chinese American theologians.

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<sup>26</sup> My own experience in receiving a less-than-affirming psychological evaluation for ordination tells me that typical Chinese parenting can seem excessively shame-based to non-Chinese, Western psychological “experts.”

<sup>27</sup> Charles, e-mail message to author, February 12, 2014.

<sup>28</sup> Ellen, e-mail message to author, February 17, 2014.

## Chapter 4

### Theology: Asian American Theological Themes of Grievance and Hope

Following the discussions of diaspora and alienation in chapters 1 and 2 and having related the stories of some Chinese immigrants joining the Episcopal Church in chapter 3, I move now to discuss the themes of grievance and hope in Asian American theology. Grievance arises naturally from the history of the institutionalized oppression of Asians in the United States (the trope of “the Asian as perpetual foreigner”), a narrative presented not only in the field of Asian American studies, for which I have provided a cursory overview in chapter 2, but also frequently recapitulated in works of Asian American theology.<sup>1</sup> In this chapter I direct my attention to the trope of “Asians as model minority,” speculating whether it might be time to step beyond grievance, enlarge our field of vision, and imagine a theology that will yield some measure of hope.

#### *Marginality*

The two tropes of Asian American marginality—Asians as “the model minority,” and Asians as “perpetual foreigners”—are inextricably intertwined, as the Asian American historical and culture-critical literature demonstrates.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Jonathan Y. Tan, *Introducing Asian American Theologies*, 20-35; Fred Vergara *Mainstreaming: Asian Americans in the Episcopal Church* (New York: Episcopal Church Center, 2005), 25-49; Jung Young Lee, *Marginality: The Key to Multicultural Theology*. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 8-26. For a brief treatment of just the Chinese experience of immigration, see Fenggang Yang, *Religions in Asian America: Building Faith Communities* (Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira, 2002), 72-76. Using more strictly historical texts, I briefly reviewed the Chinese immigration narrative in chapter 2, above.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Frank H. Wu, *Yellow: Race in American Beyond Black and White* (New York: Basic, 2002); and Ellen D. Wu, *The Color of Success: Asian Americans and the Origins of the Model Minority* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014). Ellen D. Wu’s extensively researched historical treatment may be the last word on the model minority trope. She details the historical and geopolitical conditions

The idea of the Asian as the perpetual foreigner refers to the dominant white population's view of Asians as incapable of assimilation, always the other, "notwithstanding the fact that many of them are born in the United States, have English names, and are able to speak good English."<sup>3</sup> In chapter 2 I offered examples of and my thoughts about how the "perpetual foreigner" trope is experienced. At this point I also suggest that it remains to be seen what long-term effects Asian/non-Asian biraciality, or the raising of Asian adoptees in non-Asian families, will influence how the trope of the perpetual foreigner will manifest itself for future Asian Americans.<sup>4</sup>

The other trope in the rhetoric of marginality and grievance found in the discussion of the Asian American experience has to do with what Sharon Tan describes as our status as "middleman minorities,"<sup>5</sup> and what others have noticed as a glass ceiling. Asian Americans, according to this narrative, are only allowed to rise so high, no matter how accomplished and well prepared to assume leadership in their fields. These phenomena are subsumed under the more widely discussed issue of Asian Americans as "the myth of the model minority." There are two questions at issue: (1) is "the model minority" indeed a myth? and (2) whether myth or reality, what is the impact of this perception in terms of racism and inter-racial relationships in American society?

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under which it arose; the intentional social and political ends which it served; and the active participation of Japanese- and Chinese-American leaders and institutions in creating it. While she makes clear the insidious effects it has on the American discussion of race, she also demonstrates that as an instrument of racist oppression of the Asian American community it was not imposed on us without our collusion. I am indebted to Jonathan Y. Tan's postings on Facebook for drawing my attention to this important work.

<sup>3</sup> Jonathan Y. Tan, *Introducing Asian American Theologies*, 41. See also Jung Young Lee, *Marginality*, 41-46, who asserts that the more one seeks to draw closer to the Caucasian dominant group, the more one experiences alienation.

<sup>4</sup> At this point it may be germane to note again that most of the Dialog Partners are married to non-Asians, though this was not at all a selection criterion.

<sup>5</sup> Sharon M. Tan, "Composing Integrity: An Approach to Moral Agency for Asian Americans," *Journal of Race, Ethnicity, and Religion* 3 no. 2.10 (January 2012): 6.



While certainly a pressing concern among those Jonathan Tan identifies as “first-generation” Asian American theologians, I suggest that the discourse about the perception of Asian Americans as “the model minority” is fraught, complex, and frustrating—especially in “normal conversation” with non-Asians, as opposed to the pages of academic history and theology. How credibly can we continue the lament of grievance about the model minority myth when it is increasingly easy for our interlocutors to identify so many instances that challenge the case for grievance? Just a few examples from Pew will provide us with some impressive data:

Educational attainment among Asian Americans is markedly higher than that of the U.S. population overall. Among those ages 25 and older, 49% hold at least a college degree, compared with 28% of the U.S. population overall. . . . One reflection of their high level of educational attainment is that half of employed Asian Americans (50%) are in management, professional and related occupations, a higher degree than the roughly 40% for employed Americans overall. Many of these occupations require advanced degrees. . . . Educational attainment and occupational patterns are key factors in explaining the above-average household incomes for Asian Americans as a whole—a median \$66,000 in 2010, vs. \$49,800 for the U.S. population—and for most country of origin groups. . . . Median household wealth for Asian Americans was \$83,500 in 2010, according to a Pew Research analysis of data from the Census Bureau’s Survey of Income and Program Participation . . . higher than the median net worth for households overall (\$68,529). Compared with other race or ethnic groups, Asian Americans had lower median household wealth than non-Hispanic whites (\$112,000). But Asian-American wealth was notably higher than it was for Hispanics (\$7,800) or for blacks (\$5,730).<sup>6</sup>

Individuals (e.g., I. M. Pei, Yo-yo Ma, Gary Locke) can easily be cited by almost anyone to demonstrate that the highest levels of achievement and recognition have become accessible to Chinese Americans for several decades. Citing these examples of material success should not prevent us from seeing the whole picture, however. While Chinese Americans, for instance, share in the higher rates of educational attainment and

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<sup>6</sup> Pew Research Center, *The Rise of Asian Americans*, updated edition April 4, 2013, <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/files/2013/04/Asian-Americans-new-full-report-04-2013.pdf>, 25-30.

annual income that Asian Americans in general exhibit when compared to the national average, it should also be remembered that “the share of adult Chinese Americans who live in poverty is 14%, slightly higher than the shares of all Asian Americans (12%) and of the US population overall (13%).”<sup>7</sup> A single story can embody better than any statistic what the lived experience of Chinese American poverty looks and feels like, and persuade us that it is by no means uncommon.<sup>8</sup> The necessary nuance and additional facts that modify the model minority trope must be brought to light, or the trope will mask the important and often neglected narrative of immigrant poverty, injustice, and despair in which Chinese Americans also have a significant share.

Thus, I certainly do not intend to dismiss the importance of challenging the idea of Asians as the model minority. Fortuitously, an uproar arose in the social media in late 2013 and early 2014, which has created a moment for all of us to examine the trope anew. The moment concerns the fifteen minutes of fame of one Amy Chua, a Chinese American Yale law professor who has written two provocative books (the second co-authored with her husband, another Yale law professor): *The Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother* (2012), and *The Triple Package: How Three Unlikely Traits Explain the Rise and Fall of Cultural Groups in America* (2014).<sup>9</sup> Both these books, apparently, feed on and

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>8</sup> Vivian Yee and Jeffrey E. Singer, “The Death of a Family, and an American Dream,” *New York Times*, December 29, 2013: “America’s Chinese restaurants are a diaspora of the Fuzhounese, nearly half a million of them hoping, like generations of immigrants before them, that long hours and low wages will someday make their uprooting worth it.”

<sup>9</sup> Amy Chua, *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother* (New York: Penguin, 2012); and Amy Chua and Jed Rubenfeld, *The Triple Package: How Three Unlikely Traits Explain the Rise and Fall of Cultural Groups in America* (New York: Penguin, 2014). Chua and her husband present the main thrust of their argument in “What Drives Success,” *New York Times*, Sunday Review, January 26, 2014. Ellen D. Wu’s excellent, persuasively researched, and corrective explication of the Asian as model minority effectively counters Amy Chua’s exploitation of the model minority trope. See Wu, *The Color of Success*, 254, for her

glorify the model minority trope, pointing to Chinese, other Asians, and other selected ethnic or cultural groups (e.g., Lebanese Americans, Nigerians, and Mormons) as exhibiting three model traits—a sense of superiority, a sense of inferiority, and impulse control—to be emulated to achieve material success.<sup>10</sup> Perhaps the most incoherent part of Chua and Rubenfeld’s argument occurs on the last page. Following an energetic book-length argument on how certain groups exhibit qualities that tend to lead toward success, they conclude: “The real promise of a Triple Package America is the promise of a day when there are no longer any successful groups in the United States—only successful individuals.”<sup>11</sup> They thus completely elide the question of how *group* norms are to be adopted and exploited by lone individuals, or even by families, apart from a group cultural context.

The responses to Chua’s work clearly identify the dangers of allowing the model minority trope to go unchallenged. Among these dangers are that (1) divisions and even violent tensions between Asian Americans and other minorities are exacerbated, as resentment of the supposedly exceptional Asian ability to overcome racism and economic disadvantage is flaunted; (2) the supposed success of Asian Americans is used as a weapon to dismiss the historic systemic racism and oppression that have held down African Americans, Hispanic Americans, and Native Americans, and places the blame on their relative inability to rise on personal, cultural, or even genetic weakness; and (3) the

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treatment of *Tiger Mother*, and, for her comment on *The Triple Package* see Ellen D. Wu, “Asian Americans and the ‘Model Minority’ Myth,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 23, 2014, <http://www.latimes.com/opinion/commentary/la-oe-0123-wu-chua-model-minority-chinese-201401234,0,849364.story#ixzz2rM8K3ysv>.

<sup>10</sup> The authors describe how these three model traits are exhibited among Chinese Americans in Chua and Rubenfeld, *The Triple Package*, 120-131.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 225.

explicit and specific “success formula” supposedly followed by Asian Americans will be yet one more layer of oppression to burden those Asian Americans who cannot conform to its demands, or who do not succeed when they try—there are, after all, Asian Americans who are not good at math, who are not disciplined and methodical, who are not more able than others to control their impulses. One passionate on-line challenge to Chua’s exploitation of the model minority trope ends with a vision of the United States that expresses what I hope I am offering as the Christian theological heart of this entire essay, the theological sociology which it seeks (and so, where the author refers to “the United States,” “America,” and “American,” I would simply substitute “world”):

The greatest of all American innovations *could one day be* the birthing of a society in which all varieties of people are able to identify in one another the shared, binding experience that defines us as human beings. . . . We are walking now through a climactic passage in American history where the long held and previously unquestioned understanding of America as a definitively White and Christian nation is being forcefully challenged by an increased diversity both in the American distribution of power and in the voices that carry the American conversation. . . . The projecting image that we see of America’s arriving future tells of a continued and intensifying economic hardship, as well as a widening fissure dividing rich and poor. Such periods of economic suffering are generally accompanied by a growing tension between different ethnic and cultural groups, often leading to violent and destructive activity. Now is a time of true vulnerability and fertility in the story of the United States . . . marked by the presence of both real danger and grand opportunity. . . . A truly Chinese principle . . . is the awareness that all the independent movements of life ultimately abide by the motion of one unified, greater destiny. The ancient Chinese recognized that the value of the individual part is expressed in its relationship and interaction with other parts in achieving the harmony of a greater whole. So too are the people—White, Black, Asian, Latino, Christian, Jewish, Muslim, etc.—of the United States of America bound to a shared path, one that is ultimately tethered to the greater destiny of humankind and the earth. We have arrived in an epoch of history where the state of interdependence and shared consequence between humans is widely visible, provable, and (most importantly) teachable—and America, this cradle that nurses a thousand ancestries, is a fitting place to develop and broadcast such thoughts that would make all of us more aware of our being inseparably bound to one another. In this way, our nation, and the world, might intuitively understand that it can only be in the recognition *our great common cause*, in joining together of our individual

strengths, and in the sharing of our collective responsibilities that we will pass through honorably to the next stage of humankind [all emphases in the original].<sup>12</sup>

Even in the face of continuing racism against Asian Americans, I am yet trying to highlight the tactical difficulties and complexity of challenging the trope of the Asian as model minority. It is indeed a trope that does political, psychological, and cultural damage, even as it is difficult to persuade our non-Asian interlocutors that it is a myth in the sense of being factually untrue. Deconstructing the trope is a tricky business, as Asian Americans attempt to draw attention to our racial oppression, while also differentiating our oppression clearly from that of other American communities of color such as Native Americans, African Americans, and Hispanic Americans. Issues of affirmative action in university admissions, for instance, have been found to be complex and multifaceted as far as Asian Americans are concerned, because it is incontestable that statistically Asian Americans are or can be admitted into elite institutions of higher learning at rates significantly higher than our overall proportion of the population.<sup>13</sup>

To arrive at an experientially relevant Asian American theology, then, we may need to incorporate recent history and adjust the rhetoric of grievance, if we want to gain a credible hearing among our non-Asian interlocutors. We will need to learn the historical facts that Ellen D. Wu presents that show Asian American complicity in creating and exploiting the model minority trope throughout its history to gain socioeconomic advantage by distinguishing Asians as the “good,” “successful,” “well-behaved”

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<sup>12</sup> Jie-Song Zhang, “Tiger Mom vs. Brooklyn Dragon: I Hereby Challenge Amy Chua to a Barefist Kung Fu Duel,” *Huffington Post*, January 21, 2014, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jiesong-zhang/tiger-mom-vs-brooklyn-dra\\_b\\_4612775.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jiesong-zhang/tiger-mom-vs-brooklyn-dra_b_4612775.html).

<sup>13</sup> Ethan Bronner, “Asian-Americans in the Argument” *New York Times*, November 4, 2012, <http://mobile.nytimes.com/2012/11/04/education/edlife/affirmative-action-a-complicated-issue-for-asian-americans.xml>.

minority, as opposed to other minorities who have yet to see complete redress for centuries of racial oppression.<sup>14</sup> I was therefore grateful to see that theologian Sharon Tan offers just this nuance in discussing partial power and partial oppression:

Our experience as Asian Americans differs from that of the dominant white culture and the other subordinate minority cultures. Thus, we must recognize that we have different interpretations and thus different *responsibilities* from both the dominant and other subordinate groups.

Asian American moral agency must respond to both the experiences and interpretations of our partial power and of our partial oppression. In other words, we must be attentive to, responsive to and responsible for the fact of partial privilege. In particular, we have a responsibility to connect that partial privilege to our partial oppression. This is the task of complex integrity: we have the responsibility to use our partial privilege to ameliorate the oppression of others. The particular pain of oppression we feel is a call to us to work for justice for others suffering similar and worse pain.<sup>15</sup>

Understanding that a fairly visible swath of the Asian American population complicates, by its record of extraordinary achievement, how the aspect of marginality described as the Asian American as “model minority” may be received by the dominant group as well as non-Asian communities of color, I welcome nuanced insights such as Sharon Tan’s “partial privilege and partial oppression” as adding to the credibility of our theological reflection, and to the fidelity of that reflection to our lived experience.

### *Transnationality*

The concept of transnationality further complicates notions of an essentialized Asian American identity by describing contemporary developments that enable regular travel back and forth between the nation and culture of origin and North America—

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<sup>14</sup> Ellen D. Wu spells out quite clearly throughout *The Color of Success* that the model minority trope was constructed consciously by both whites and Asians, expressly to differentiate post-World War II Japanese- and Chinese-Americans (each seeking to gain or regain standing either lost during the war years or jeopardized by the ensuing Cold War tensions with the People’s Republic of China) from the more negatively perceived African- and Hispanic-Americans.

<sup>15</sup> Sharon M. Tan, “Composing Integrity,” 13-14; emphasis in the original.

contemporary developments such as the increasing ease of global travel and multiple advances in communications technology, to which one must add the opening up of the People's Republic of China and other Asian nations that labored under repressive or chaotic regimes. As Jonathan Tan notes, transnationality—along with the phenomena of (1) the adoption of Asian children by non-Asian Americans; and (2) the formation of bi- and multi-racial Asian Americans through cross-racial marriage—further complicates the question of Asian American identity, such that

. . . instead of a linear Asian American identity, we are now confronted with a hybridized, nuanced, and multidimensional transnational Asian American identities [sic] that are simultaneously rooted in the United States while reaching out and becoming attached to other social, familial, and religious contexts in Asia. . . . We find Asian Americans becoming creative and adept at negotiating multiple belongings and loyalties, developing a hybridized sense of belonging simultaneously to the United States as well as countries that they or their forebears have left.<sup>16</sup>

We have seen how Andrea Louie has described the complexities and nuance required to understand transnationality as it is actually lived by Chinese and Chinese Americans in the late twentieth/early twenty-first centuries, and have learned of some specific instances of Chinese transnational lives in today's world (see chapter 1).

And yet, though clearly identifying the multiplicity of possibilities for Asian American identity formation in the early twenty-first century, Jonathan Tan is also capable of chiding Eric Liu, author of *The Accidental Asian: Notes of a Native Speaker*, for describing the possibility that “everyone, Asian American or otherwise, is free to choose the extent, if any, of identification with a specific racial or ethnic group.”<sup>17</sup> It

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<sup>16</sup> Jonathan Y. Tan, “From Classical Tradition Maintenance to Remix *Traditioning*: Revisioning Asian American Theologies for the 21st Century,” *Journal of Race, Ethnicity, and Religion* 3, no. 2.3 (January 2012): 17.

<sup>17</sup> Jonathan Y. Tan, *Introducing Asian American Theologies*, 50.

does not seem to me that Tan can have it two ways—that with globalization, transnationalism, and Asian Americans being members of non-Asian American families, the question of Asian American identity is open to an array of possibilities that are broader than ever, and then criticize someone else for recognizing that array of possibilities and reasonably choosing from among them.<sup>18</sup> Though Tan often and clearly warns against the dangers of essentializing an Asian American identity—perhaps more persuasively than any of the other writers I have read—I still sometimes get the feeling that my life is still being essentialized—not least by other Chinese—and that there is a prescribed or preferable way to form our identity, to hyphenate our diasporic label. At least one Dialog Partner has also felt this way:

**The only times I sense this type of racism are when I am involved with the Chinese born Chinese (CBC) versus the American born Chinese (ABC). I have found that the CBCs tend to discount their ABC counterparts - myself included - because we don't speak the language or know the customs and therefore sometimes treat us and speak to us as "lesser" Chinese.**

*Ellen*

Kwok Pui-lan's presentation of the possibilities of transnationality and political theology in the Asia Pacific, and her specific focus on the People's Republic of China, provides context to address a post-1949 narrative of Chinese politics, culture, and

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<sup>18</sup> “[Diaspora] makes itself felt in multiple ways within what is ostensibly a single homogeneous community. It implies that one has a choice of staying or going and allows for the possibility that one may or may not have loyalties to the ultimate place of origin. Certainly someone in diaspora may feel rooted and at home right where she is, embodying a transnational identity (manifest, for example, in maintaining dual citizenship) . . . a dual consciousness. . . . A tangled web of continuities and discontinuities it is indeed.” Rachel A. R. Bundang, “Home as Memory, Metaphor, and Promise in Asian/Pacific American Religious Experience,” *Semeia* 90/91 (2002): 94. See also Jonathan Y. Tan’s proposal for “traditioning” in “From Classical Tradition Maintenance to Remix *Traditioning*”—which I take to be very similar to my proposal for the individual freedom to hyphenate as one chooses. Since writing the above, I have communicated with Jonathan Y. Tan on Facebook, and he graciously accepted my criticism and states that his views changed in subtle but important ways between writing *Introducing Asian American Theologies* and the “Remix *Traditioning*” article. Personal communication, February 18, 2014.



spirituality.<sup>19</sup> She describes the presence of a political theology that is “post-secular” in the North Atlantic, and “post-colonial” and “de-imperial” in the Asia Pacific.<sup>20</sup> She supplies scholarly foundation to my own unfolding awareness of what has happened in my lifetime to the geographic space we refer to as “China.”

While in graduate school during the decade of the 1970s, I had superficially leftist leanings. I was disposed to look favorably on the Maoist project, including, even, the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, which was still active during my first visit to the People’s Republic of China in 1973. At that time, and at that age, it seemed to me reasonable that violently coercive thought control was necessary to dismantle centuries of inhibiting and oppressive imperial culture. Mao’s Yenan lectures on art and literature, the Western commentary they spawned, and Marxist literary criticism in general formed part of what I thought would become a fashionable and permanently useful literary aesthetic. Only after years of reflection could I admit to myself the true horror of what Maoist totalitarianism had wrought, and the implications of that horror on my adoption of a Marxist literary aesthetic, on my ability to fool myself, and on my naive humanism.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Kwok Pui-lan, “Theological Counterpoints: Transnational and Political Theology in the Asia Pacific,” *Journal of Race, Ethnicity, and Religion* 3, no. 2.5 (January 2012):1-21.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>21</sup> As an example of what I consider necessary truth-telling, the Chinese famine caused by Mao’s Great Leap Forward should be as salient an event in Chinese American identity formation as the Exclusion Acts or the Vincent Chin murder. Thirty-six million people starved to death between 1958 and 1962, and I think it is inadequate for a Chinese American not to wonder about the effect of such a cataclysm not just on humanity in general, but on that portion of humanity to which—however partially or tangentially—we are necessarily related. See Yang Jisheng, *Tombstone: The Great Chinese Famine, 1958-1962*, trans. Stacy Mosher and Gao Jian (New York: Farrar Straus & Giroux, 2012), reviewed by Jonathan Mirsky, “Unnatural disaster: the Chinese famine of the mid-20th century is a monument to Maoist tyranny, a journalist argues,” *New York Times Book Review*, December 9, 2012. In addition, when I read Asian American theologians write of the great pain and cost of the Asian American experience as we negotiate the complexities of marginalization and liminality, struggling to achieve self-identity against “the unresolvable conflict between the impossibility of letting go of one’s own ethnic, cultural, and ancestral belonging and at the same time realizing that the assertion of one’s own particularity is perceived as

And then, only a few years after Mao's death, Deng Xiaoping ushered in market reforms that quickly grew into an explosively energetic form of state capitalism, which has resulted, within the space of three decades, in China's becoming the second largest economy in the world. It should be clear to anyone that in 2014 Marxism is China's state ideology in name only, if at all. Thus, in light of the effective dissolution of the state religion, which was intended to supplant the philosophical and spiritual foundations of traditional Chinese culture, Kwok's summation of Chinese social scientist Liu Peng's analysis seems utterly apt: "Since the late 1970s, with economic reforms and open-door policies, the major concern for the Chinese people has been to become rich as fast as possible. Social and moral problems in China are, therefore, rampant as a result of a spiritual vacuum and a crisis of faith."<sup>22</sup>

The possibility of a spiritual vacuum in the PRC Chinese context—the largest population, the second largest economy, and the fastest rising regional and global military power on the planet—is something all Chinese American Christians may want to consider part of their purview. It is not a matter of idle interest, not to be contemplated from afar, but a locus of possible danger and opportunity that concerns us all, not least those of us who believe in an incarnational God who is intensely interested in how we

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deviance by the society at large" (Fumitaka Matsuoka, *Out of Silence: Emerging Themes in Asian American Churches*, Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1995, 59), I must also ask whether anyone would prefer the cost of staying "home" where the pain of marginalization is not incurred, but where the price of staying "home" might have been death by starvation.

<sup>22</sup> Kwok, "Theological Counterpoints," 14.

relate to each other across this planet—in other words, those of us seeking to discover a theological sociology that encompasses all significant global human relationships.<sup>23</sup>

Transnationality is an important concomitant feature of globalization, and, as Tan and Kwok have indicated, transnationality may be an opportunity and a challenge that is particularly accessible to Chinese and Americans of Chinese descent. Transnationality is one major concomitant of modern diaspora, cutting against expectations of home, settlement, and stasis. If we accept the pervasiveness and inevitability of diaspora and interspersions, then one implication for Asian Americans is spelled out by Sharon Tan:

Renewed relationship between the various parts of ourselves first requires that we Asian Americans accept our biculturality. We stop striving for monoculturality either by clinging unquestioningly to our identity in the old world or by acculturating equally unquestioningly into the dominant society. It may mean accepting the fact that conflict in identity, with its attendant conflict in moral norms, is a normal and inevitable response to the fractured worlds we live in.<sup>24</sup>

Can we Christians, and we Asian American Christians, see the prevailing diasporic themes of our sacred narrative and apply them creatively to our own earthly particularity? Can we then reflect on what these applications might be telling us and begin to understand our faith as a liberating and empowering call to baptismal identity, lived out in a global context? What would it look like if we could show others a Christianity that is not a faith tradition imposed through imperial strategies, but rather as one lens through which we can see the world in life-giving, justice-making, reconciling ways; as an empowering spirit leading us to act in the world to bring understanding,

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<sup>23</sup> For a brief discussion of the revival of Confucianism in the People's Republic of China and its potential for competition with the growth of Christianity (largely Protestant), see Kevin Yao, "Contemporary Confucian Revival and Its Interactions with Christianity in China," *ChinaSource* 16, no. 1 (March, 2014), <http://www.chsource.org/en/articles/christianity-and-other-religions/item/518-contemporary-confucian-revival-and-its-interactions-with-christianity-in-china>.

<sup>24</sup> Sharon M. Tan, "Composing Integrity," 24.

healing, liberation, and peace to all people, honoring all the while all lenses, all faiths, and all lived realities? As we saw in chapter 2, Dialog Partner Yvonne has accepted this challenge, “as a practicing Christian,” making “an intentional, political statement . . . in support of building the Beloved Community of Jesus Christ and realizing the kingdom now, here on earth, in our lifetimes.”<sup>25</sup>

### *Liminality*

Jung Young Lee notes positive and negative perspectives on marginality. He describes a “‘new marginality’ as a corrective for classical marginality.”<sup>26</sup> Similarly, Sharon Tan names “liminality” as the silver lining of marginality. Although, as she points out, many writers use liminality and marginality as interchangeable terms, she follows Sang Hyun Lee in understanding liminality to be “marginality with a creative edge, or marginality that is open to creative possibilities.”<sup>27</sup>

The vocabulary used by Sang Hyun Lee and Sharon Tan is apt. The margin is a place to which we are banished. If one stands in the margin, one is put there by someone else—one “is marginalized,” the passive voice in this grammar being the salient feature.

The in-between-ness of the Asian Americans’ marginality is neither a temporary nor an entirely voluntary situation. Asian Americans are forced to remain in between, pushed to stay there. . . . the Asian American in-between-ness is a forced in-between-ness. Thus, as we relate the two dimensions in the marginal predicament of Asian Americans, we come to the realization that the marginality of Asian Americans is a *coerced in-between-ness*, or an in-between-ness that is made seemingly permanent by the dominant group.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Yvonne, e-mail message to author, July 24, 2013.

<sup>26</sup> Jung Young Lee, *Marginality*, 55-76.

<sup>27</sup> Sharon M. Tan, “Composing Integrity,” 3. See also Sang Hyun Lee, “Marginality as Coerced Liminality: Toward an Understanding of the Context of Asian American Theology,” in *Realizing the America of Our Hearts: Theological Voices of Asian Americans*, ed. Fumitaka Matsuoka and Eleazar S. Fernandez (St. Louis: Chalice, 2003), 11-28.

<sup>28</sup> Sang Hyun Lee, “Marginality as Coerced Liminality,” 13.

“Liminal,” on the other hand derives from the Latin word for “threshold,” something that we have the choice of crossing over, either to enter or to exit. A threshold is an invitation to movement. The door, for which a threshold is the marker, opens to us the possibility of stepping into a new space.

Insofar as 1.5- and later generations of Asian Americans inherit the marginality of their first-generation ancestors, they can recast that marginality as liminality. They can re-conceive their relegation to the margins as a challenge to engage a range of liminal possibilities. Kwok Pui-lan offers us just such a specific invitation to recast marginality as liminality in a new age of transnationalism, globalization, and technological complexity, building on the language of Fumitaka Matsuoka:

[Matsuoka] writes, “A person in a liminal world is poised in uncertainty and ambiguity between two or more social constructs, reflecting in the soul the discords and harmonies, repulsions and attractions.” I believe transnationalism and globalization have thrust many people into living in such “holy insecurity,” as Matsuoka calls it. We stand at the threshold of a new age, in which technology and the information highway would radically transform our understanding of theological community and enable us to hear counterpoints that we might not have imagined before.<sup>29</sup>

One aspect of liminality as the hopeful side of marginalization is what Jonathan Tan and others recognize as the advantages of negotiating multiple identities. As he aptly implies, this can be an adaptive strategy in a globalized, transnational world.

As I learned from my own brief travels to the People’s Republic of China and to Taiwan, and as Andrea Louie more extensively describes in her study of the participants

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<sup>29</sup> Kwok, “Theological counterpoints,” 21. Kwok cites Fumitaka Matsuoka, *Out of Silence: Emerging Themes in Asian American Churches* (Cleveland: United Church Press, 1998), 54, 53.

in the In Search of Roots program,<sup>30</sup> being in diaspora—especially in a world where intercontinental communications are instantaneous and global travel is commonplace—is not merely a complex of disabilities but also offers the possibility of empowered agency. From a Christian perspective, it offers a liminal platform from which we can entertain real possibilities for hope. In fact, for those of us who, on the surface, embody the trope of the Asian as model minority, our economic and social privilege enable us more than others to see our marginalization more hopefully as liminal possibility.

Crossing oceans to learn one's "own" culture; feeling alienated and even invisible where one thought to find a home; holding multiple identities in a tension that one hopes is creative and empowering, rather than paralyzing—for some reason this all makes me wonder whether Chinese, like the Jews and early Christians of Scripture, are not quintessential postcolonial, global cultural communities. Unlike the stereotype of the ugly American traveling abroad, we are natural chameleons; we are not afraid to learn second and third languages, second and third cultures; and we have a secure sense of what grounds us in our own traditions and/or how detached from that tradition we choose to feel. And we have been ubiquitous in diaspora.

Sharon Tan notes how the negotiation of multiple identities requires of the Asian American an ethic of "complex integrity" in order to arrive at a moral agency. In working toward reconciliation as the moral template for complex integrity, we are called to cultivate justice:

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<sup>30</sup> Andrea Louie, *Chineseness Across Borders: Renegotiating Chinese Identities in China and the United States* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004).

Justice as a part of complex integrity is the cultivation of right relationships among one's various inner selves and between the inner and outer selves. The classic Greek notion of justice is to give each his or her due. Thus, justice within the self could be to honor appropriately the different moral claims to which we are subject. To do ourselves justice as Asian Americans is to give our various alliances and loyalties their due, by honoring appropriately the different claims, norms, and cultural values in our lives, as both Asians and Americans. Linking this to the biblical language of *shalom*, to honor appropriately the different cultural claims upon one's life is to be whole, at peace with oneself.<sup>31</sup>

### *Holy Insecurity—Adapting and Thriving on the Margin*

Fumitaka Matsuoka is held in the highest respect by other Asian American theologians.<sup>32</sup> I therefore looked forward to exploring further his elaboration of the idea of “holy insecurity,” as I anticipated it would relate well to my thoughts about diaspora and marginality as not only disabilities to be lamented, but more hopefully as persistent, unavoidable world realities demanding careful negotiation by all people, migrants and others. By calling insecurity “holy,” I thought Matsuoka would be lifting up the empowering, creative aspects of liminality, offering solid hope to those in the margin.<sup>33</sup>

Indeed, he eventually does get to this. After 25 pages of a 30-page chapter, a hopeful statement finally appears: “It is, in fact, the experience and acceptance of an ambiguous and dynamic state of life that allows a person the transformation of values and worldviews.”<sup>34</sup> As I read him, however, most of what Matsuoka offers is more of the language of grievance and lament, such that it threatens to overwhelm the more important message of hope. But Matsuoka's original impulse in identifying “holy insecurity” is what is important and life-giving. If diaspora is the rule of life in scripture and history,

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<sup>31</sup> Sharon M. Tan, “Composing Integrity,” 23.

<sup>32</sup> Eleazar S. Fernandez, ed., *New Overtures: Asian North American Theology in the 21st Century (Essays in Honor of Fumitaka Matsuoka)*, *Journal of Race, Ethnicity, and Religion* 3:2 (January 2012).

<sup>33</sup> Matsuoka, “Holy Insecurity: Asian American Faith Quest for Identity,” chap. 2 in *Out of Silence*, 53-84.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

then those of us who live in this state must embrace a certain measure of insecurity as part of our inheritance, as part of our existence. We can choose to see it as a sacred gift rather than a disabling affliction. We can look around us and see that perhaps, in a diasporic world, we are none of us completely “home,” and we are none of us promised a land that belongs exclusively to us. We may begin to understand that we should all—migrant and native alike—be striving for a sense of home and belonging together. From that shared, existential, liminal stance, we may begin to see a way forward.

*Historical, Dialogical, Diasporic, and Moral Imagination*

Addressing the methods of the theological project challenging us in the present age, Kwok Pui-lan encourages us in the use of imagination to elucidate history, especially by uncovering the hidden or unrecorded histories of those left out of the dominant narrative; to put different voices in dialog, so as to discover new insights that would be unavailable to a single-voiced discourse; and to direct our attention to the experience of people in diaspora, as a way to de-center and de-privilege the unitary narrative of the dominant Euro-American West.<sup>35</sup>

“The historical imagination,” Kwok writes, “aims not only to reconstitute the past, but also to release the past so that the present is livable.” Historical imagination placed in the service of the disenfranchised and the marginalized is not an attempt to substitute one grand narrative for another, or to place one’s hope “on the final *eschaton*, on an unpredictable utopia, or on historical progress. History . . . is too full of ambiguities and unpredictable twists and turns to be constructed as linear, progressive, or sprinkled with

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<sup>35</sup> Kwok Pui-lan, “Postcolonial Imagination: Historical, Dialogical, and Diasporic,” in *Postcolonial Imagination & Feminist Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 29-51.



unchecked opinion.”<sup>36</sup> Historical imagination finds new, previously hidden narratives that may empower and offer hope in the practical, concrete present. Historical imagination would allow Chinese Americans to move beyond the lament over past grievances and assess what elements of our present offer hope for the future.

The dialogical imagination acknowledges the reality that narratives—in particular biblical narratives—may not always be read as the dominant consciousness thinks they “ought” to be read. It constantly challenges the dangers of essentialism, and sees that essentialism is a temptation not just for the dominant center, but also for the voices from the periphery. While inviting multiple voices, the dialogical imagination remains acutely sensitive to the dynamics of power, recognizing, as Kwok states, “that in our postcolonial world, all the voices are not equal and some cultures dominate center stage.”<sup>37</sup>

Finally, the diasporic imagination remembers the subject who is “multiply located, always doubly displaced, and having to negotiate an ambivalent past, while holding on to fragments of memories, cultures, and histories in order to dream of a different future.”<sup>38</sup> Kwok notes the two-way resonances of the Jewish and Chinese experiences of diaspora as an example of the diasporic imagination at work,<sup>39</sup> thus offering a provocative and enlivening alternative to the other, oppressive feature of Jewish-Chinese similarity, that of the “model minority.”

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 42. I offered examples of readings of Scripture that engage our dialogical imaginations in chapter 1, where I also pointed to Leng Lim’s reminder that we must always be aware of the power or lack of power behind the voice that is reading Scripture to, for, and at us.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 50.

In a lucid, plain-spoken and challenging address to the bishops of the Episcopal Church, Leng Lim calls them to unfetter their moral imaginations to find the Church's way forward in the ever-more globalized future.<sup>40</sup> Lim describes globalization as "about the breakdown of national barriers, and the formation of one worldwide market for the trading of goods and services, a market with an increasingly seamless flow of capital, knowledge, people, and information."<sup>41</sup> He encourages the bishops to apply their moral imaginations to conceive of their role beyond the boundaries of American denominational administration, to explore how their accumulated historical privilege might be calling them to a wider project of global healing and reconciliation.

What Lim says to the American Episcopal bishops could just as well, for the most part, be addressed to privileged Chinese American Christians whether lay or ordained. Increasingly the globalized and rapidly increasing disparities between the wealthy and the impoverished are being driven by the globalized economy, led by the two largest economies—the United States and China. Just as Lim challenges the bishops to expand their horizon of concern, to exploit their access to people of power and privilege, so we Chinese Americans of privilege might consider balancing whatever sense of grievance and historical injury we read in the Asian American theological narrative with a morally imaginative exploration of what our social standing and privilege might empower us to do, in the context of both American society and the globalized community.

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<sup>40</sup> Leng Lim, "Globalization and the Legacy of the West: A Call for Moral Imagination," in *Waging Reconciliation: God's Mission in a Time of Globalization and Crisis*, ed. Ian T. Douglas (New York: Church Publishing, 2002), 101-33.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

Though not addressing Asian American or Chinese American concerns, Julie Clawson elegantly marries Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutic of imagination with Jürgen Moltmann's theology of hope to yield the possibility of living in the present not weighed down by the grievances of the past, nor surrendering to a facile, blind trust in a utopian future. Focusing our imaginations on "the ultimate text—the 'word event' of Jesus being the Word made flesh," we come to a point where "faith . . . becomes about living the narrative of the Christian story in a way that shapes present reality by faithfully responding to tradition and permits elements of the dreams of utopia to break into the status quo."<sup>42</sup> "One is able then to live into the hope of future redemption and reconciliation by performing the text of the incarnation/resurrection through acts of hope in the present."<sup>43</sup> I suggest that, given the practical, real-life faith concerns that the Dialog Partners considered to be personally important (see chapter 3), our Asian American theologians might move beyond stances rooted in the grievances of our past history and offer fresh examinations, culturally and historically grounded, of the theological constructs our laity actually use—for example, forgiveness, gratitude, and grace. In doing so, we might learn how to apply our imaginations to engender hope in the present, to guide our steps toward a more reconciled future.

### *Making All Things New*

Kwok Pui-lan points out how narrow it is to think of the diaspora of Asians, and specifically of the Chinese, as strictly an East-West affair. She points out that "the Asian

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<sup>42</sup> Julie Clawson, "Imagination, Hope, and Reconciliation in Ricoeur and Moltmann," *Anglican Theological Review* 95, no. 2 (Spring 2013): 303.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 307.

Pacific diasporic experience refers not only to those who leave Asia to go to the West, but also successive waves of migration of Asians, such as Indians and Chinese, to other Asian countries and Pacific islands.” Based on this knowledge, Kwok also states, “I want to problematize any stabilized concepts of ‘home’ and ‘diasporic.’”<sup>44</sup>

The demographic evidence is clear that Chinese people have been in diaspora over large parts of the rest of Asia for centuries. While racial intermingling with indigenous populations has obviously taken place during that time, there is also evidence that Chinese people, much like the biblical Jews, have also managed to keep themselves separate from such natives as Malays, Vietnamese, and Laotians.<sup>45</sup>

We therefore cannot understand diaspora as simply a biblical affair involving the biblical people of God that was then taken on to give theological resonance to the settling of various European and Asian migrations to North America. As both the biblical narrative and world history indicate that migration, dispersion, and diaspora is a persistent principle in human existence, the history of Chinese people within Asia and for over one hundred fifty years in North America has shown itself to share in that principle. In projecting its economic, political, and military power across the globe, the People’s Republic of China is very likely, in the twenty-first century, to command ever more space in the world consciousness, and so how its people understand themselves culturally and spiritually will also be of increasing importance. Like it or not, we Chinese Americans will be a part of that story, whether we are Christian, religious in other ways, or secular.

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<sup>44</sup> Kwok, “Theological Counterpoints,” 20.

<sup>45</sup> “For example, there are the Chinese who established a mercantile class in the Philippines only slightly prior to the arrival of Magellan and his crew and to this day have still managed to preserve their distinctness from the general Filipino population.” Rachel A. R. Bundang, “Home as Memory, Metaphor, and Promise in Asian/Pacific American Religious Experience,” *Semeia* 90/91 (2002): 93.

What I suspect, then, is that Chinese Americans, especially in the twenty-first century, and in part because many non-Asians will continue to see us as being somehow continuous with Chinese people from China (the stubbornly persistent view of us as the perpetual foreigner), must grapple with dual realities of empire. It is insufficient for us only to look at our history of oppression by white Americans in the United States, as if our ancestors had not also encountered and perhaps even fostered imperial oppression and racist colonization, as if our cousins do not do so to this day in Tibet, Xinjiang, Africa, the South China Sea, and wherever there are natural resources to feed the People's Republic of China's insatiable economic hunger. If we are to be honest and just about a desire to resist oppression, then we may need to call ourselves to recognize that the land of our ancestors has reassumed its status as a regional and global empire (however much the Chinese leadership eschews the epithets of "empire" and "superpower") with all the technological sophistication and global reach of any other imperial project now in operation.

From my reading of the biblical record on the whole question of diaspora, I also question whether our dichotomies of center and periphery, of metropolis and outland, of home and away, sufficiently serve the purpose of a theological sociology that is deep enough and capacious enough to imagine a real possibility of healing and reconciliation. I propose that to prepare our minds for a truly comprehensive liberation of humanity, we need to apply our imaginations to a pneumatological re-mapping of human geography, a Pentecost-centered re-mapping of the cultural and psychological boundaries dividing peoples, and to open our eyes to the facts of who exactly lives where, and who exactly

“belongs” where. These imaginings might provide rich themes for biblical interpretation and homiletical practice. Here is an excerpt of the sermon I preached on the second Sunday of Advent, 2012:

The powerful theme of coming home to the center declared by Isaiah, and echoed by Luke, may continue to resonate for us, but we are faced today with the new question of what home could actually mean, what home is for us, and what we do to make the place we are...“home.”

Home for God’s people is not a single place on the earth, the center to which we return from our exile, from our scattering abroad to strange places. In a world that has grown more globalized through the imperial histories that scripture records, through the more recent imperial histories that we ourselves have lived, “home” for God’s people is not the place of our roots. It is not the promised land. It is not Manhattan, or Mt. Airy, or Palestine, or Jerusalem, or whatever physical place where we think our hearts are planted.

Home, for God’s people, is the entire world where God calls us to live together. Home is where God desires to work with us to level the barriers of mistrust and hatred, the barriers of racism and oppression, the barriers of empire and exploitation—all the barriers that separate us one from another, that put us in violent conflict. Home is where we learn to live in right relationship with all our fellow human beings, with all those who come into our midst, and with all those to whom we ourselves journey in exile or in quest. Home is where we learn to live in justice, compassion, and reconciliation, to live the life that God dreams for us. Home is where all flesh shall see the salvation of God, and all people shall see it together. Home is where the tender compassion of our God shall break upon us like the dawn, shining a light upon our darkness and guiding our feet into the way of peace.

Throughout Scripture our salvation history describes for us the persistent experience of diaspora amidst empire. Being in diaspora forces us all to remap the boundaries between “home” and “abroad,” between “center” and “periphery”—geographically and politically, but also culturally, psychically, and spiritually.

What we are facing as we move into the third millennium is not just a global empire centered on one superpower, but a planetary empire with several compelling poles, one of which is obviously the United States, and one of which is clearly China.<sup>46</sup> If

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<sup>46</sup> Kwok Pui-lan writes, “As Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt have pointed out, today’s Empire has no territorial center of power, as there are no fixed boundaries, and center and periphery are constantly

we as Christians are to take our liberative faith seriously, we cannot face our human and ecological responsibilities with the blinders of the old narrative of nations. What we Chinese Americans Christians must ask God is not just how we are called to overcome anti-Asian prejudice in the United States, but also to wonder how our religious and spiritual responsibilities might extend to our distant cousins and their quest for new sources of spiritual sustenance after decades of constant ideological and spiritual upheaval. We might wonder about what our Christian faith might bring to that quest in the land that continued and continues to change after we or our ancestors left it.<sup>47</sup> A similar proposal for looking to religion as a way of developing a global perspective has been made in relation to African Americans: “Our understandings of African Americans and international politics must make way for religious universalism as one route to a compelling critique of colonialism and of the oppression of people of color around the globe.”<sup>48</sup> We Chinese American Christians (and especially those of us in the Episcopal Church, with our explicitly imperial Anglican roots) may be called—perhaps even uniquely called—to live in a holy insecurity while seeking to bring God’s *shalom* to the

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shifting.” See “Theological Counterpoints,” 9, where Kwok cites Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), xii. Later in that article, Kwok writes, “Although Chinese leaders have said that China does not want to become a superpower, commentators have coined the term “Chinamerica” and suggested a G2 that would put China and the United States at the head of international affairs” (ibid., 11).

<sup>47</sup> See Kwok’s recounting of contemporary Christian theological developments in the People’s Republic of China in “Theological Counterpoints,” 14-16. For an understanding of religion in today’s China, one might begin with the following: Vincent Goossaert and David A. Palmer, *The Religious Question in Modern China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011); Lian Xi, *Redeemed by Fire: The Rise of Popular Christianity in Modern China* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010); and Fenggang Yang, *Religion in China: Survival & Revival Under Communist Rule* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

<sup>48</sup> Barbara Dianne Savage, *Your Spirits Walk Beside Us: The Politics of Black Religion* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 206. Savage also writes: “Religion is an understudied but very promising route for examining global orientations among African Americans including conceptions and constructions of diaspora” (ibid., 325).

wider world of the globalized economy in which we live and move and have our being, where the transnational interests of the imperial, wealthy 1% are ever more visibly aligned across national boundaries, and ever more visibly allied against the well-being of the disenfranchised global 99%.<sup>49</sup>

The kingdom will not come appreciably closer simply by my being fully accepted, completely de-marginalized by my fellow (white) Americans. I cannot believe the God of the incarnation came to earth to share our human pain, agony, and brokenness just for that.<sup>50</sup> It is not enough to recount the oppressive history of Chinese immigrants in the United States, as I have done in chapter 2, or as Chinese American theologians seem to do with some regularity. While telling the truth of our historical injuries, we must also keep our eyes on the greater prize, the kingdom prize of reconciliation. And for that I believe we require—and pray for—hope, imagination, and grace.

In God's kingdom, none of us are home until all of us are home. The kingdom will be brought palpably closer to our lived reality if together—all indigenous peoples, all émigrés who later call themselves “natives,” all conquerors, missionaries, and migrants—we can somehow resist the divisive, exploitive impulses towards empire whenever they arise; if we can somehow fill the empty hearts of a humanity starving for spiritual sustenance, reconciliation, and the hope of true peace; if we can somehow bring all people to a theological anthropology and a theological sociology that spring from our historical, dialogical, diasporic, and moral imaginations.

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<sup>49</sup> See Joerg Rieger and Kwok Pui-lan, *Occupy Religion: Theology of the Multitude* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2012).

<sup>50</sup> “It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the survivors of Israel; I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth” (Isa. 49:6).



## **Chapter 5**

### **Mission and Ministry: From Faith to Action**

We now come to questions of mission and ministry. What do the Chinese American Dialog Partners do to participate in the life of the church, to embody their identity as Christians? I asked them to tell me not only what they do, but to consider why. I asked them to tell me what in their faith or their Christian belonging motivated them to engage in their chosen ministries.

In reading their responses, I was conscious of three filtering lenses from my own understanding of church: (1) the concept of the missional church; (2) baptismal ministry and vocation, or the ministry of the baptized—which I understand to be roughly synonymous with “the priesthood of all believers”; and (3) understanding the church as a learning community. Each of these in a different way centers not on the activity and initiative of the leader (though the role of the designated or ordained leader is naturally important) but on the activity, work, and understanding of the laity. I hope to indicate how these three concepts are interwoven.

In my questioning, I sought to uncover, in the context of the narrative of the decline of mainline congregations, the self-understanding of Chinese Americans who choose, against prevailing trends, to engage actively in the life of a mainline—specifically, an Episcopal—congregation. As already noted, these few people clearly differ from the greater numbers of Chinese Americans who consider themselves religiously unaffiliated, or the greater numbers of Chinese Americans who prefer

evangelical forms of church to mainline Protestantism, according to Pew and Fenggang Yang—see chapter 3. How did these American people of Chinese descent make the decision to commit themselves to visible ministry within the Episcopal Church? This chapter will explore these questions.

### *The Ministry of the Dialog Partners*

The Dialog Partners are all active in ministry, often at more than one level. The range of their engagement is broad, testifying to the many ways one can live into one's Christian discipleship. One person gives regularly of her time and treasure to church outreach efforts, whenever solicited; is a caring, helpful neighbor and school parent; and initiated and coordinates a multicultural program at her children's school. Another person is an active participant in church governance at the parish, diocesan, and provincial levels. Two are currently or previously mentors for at-risk youth. And yet another person combines a spectrum of in-church outreach service with service at the church-wide level of governance. Several Dialog Partners have served in the formal governance of their local parish at some time.

Thus, every Dialog Partner does something to embody in significant ways his or her Christian faith. Some of them connect what they do with their faith; others do not. For myself, I have not decided whether I think it is important at any given moment that a person be able to articulate the rationale for what they do in the terms we church professionals provide. As we will see, many of the Dialog Partners do not consider it central, either.

### *The Missional Church*

I did not ask the Dialog Partners questions about the missional church. From my immersion in some of that literature, I determined that it was directed largely to formally designated church leaders, and not so much to the laity.<sup>1</sup> It would not be anyone's intuition that an individual layperson would expect the responsibility of church vitality and congregational growth to rest on her shoulders. If I did not ask the Dialog Partners about their understanding of missional church, why then do I discuss it here? One reason is that, as explained in the Preface, I am writing as a practicing parish priest, and as such I am as interested in the challenges of congregational vitality as I am in the self-understanding of individual Christians. I am as concerned about the life of the church as a whole—in particular the Episcopal Church—as I am in the reported experiences of one subset (Chinese Americans) of Christian worshippers. The ideas behind the missional church lie at the core of my current understanding of church, mission, and ministry. Driven by my need to understand more deeply the purposes and activity of the post-modern, post-Christendom church, I hoped to catch a handful of people in the quietly counter-cultural act of living out their ministries in Episcopal congregations, to see what I could learn.

Secondly, as will be seen, the missional church, baptismal vocation and ministry, and the church as a learning community share several ideas in common, most particularly the emphasis on learning as a pre-requisite of change. I see them as intertwined and

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<sup>1</sup> An excellent exception is Dwight J. Zscheile, *People of the Way: Renewing Episcopal Identity* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse, 2012). I continue to marvel at this book's breadth, brevity, and accessibility. As a former textbook publisher, I also admire the features—such as discussion questions—that enhance its utility with congregations.

essential perspectives on congregational vitality. In the missional church literature we learn a new/old way of understanding church—leaving behind the Christendom understanding of the church as primarily a social organization, and moving toward a pre- and post-Christendom understanding of the church as local communities carrying out the *missio Dei*. Baptismal vocation and ministry teaches us to change our understanding of ministry from something performed exclusively by the ordained, to a calling that God makes to all of us. And in the church as learning community, we come to understand that continuous learning is not just a leadership strategy but in fact a basic function of the church—to call all people into continuous formation as Christian disciples.<sup>2</sup>

At first, the “missional church” would seem hard to define, and indeed, two of the key authors in the literature admit as much, devoting an entire chapter to the difficulty of arriving at a definition.<sup>3</sup> They end that chapter with a description that I venture to guess would not resonate by itself with many of today’s church-goers, nor (given my reading of their responses to other questions) with many of the Dialog Partners, either: “Missional church is about an alternative imagination for being church. It is about this transformation toward a church that is shaped by *mystery*, *memory*, and *mission*.”<sup>4</sup> Later they offer something a little more concrete: “We face a radically new challenge in the West that

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<sup>2</sup> Among her sweeping predictions of where Christianity is headed, Phyllis Tickle names “a move on the part of some Christians toward a universalism that is non-doctrinal, empathetic, and immediate. Those moving in this direction now refer to themselves as Convergents and to their movement as Convergence Christianity. Their numbers are drawn primarily from Progressive Evangelicals, Progressive Roman Catholics, *Missional mainliners*, and social justice-oriented Pentecostals and Evangelicals” (Phyllis Tickle, with Jon M. Sweeney, *The Age of the Spirit: How the Ghost of an Ancient Controversy Is Shaping the Church*, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2014, 154; emphasis added).

<sup>3</sup> Alan J. Roxburgh and M. Scott Boren, “Just Give Me a Definition: Why Missional Church Is So Hard to Define,” chap. 2 in *Introducing the Missional Church: What It Is, Why It Matters, How to Become One* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2009), 27-45.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

requires more than minor adjustments or course corrections. We need a new imagination for being the church. We need local churches to become mission agencies in their neighborhoods and communities.”<sup>5</sup> In other words, one thing that the missional church literature makes clear is that wherever else the church’s impact is felt, a good part of that impact must be felt locally. This is why the adjectival form of “mission” is “missional,” rather than “missionary.” Where “missionary” describes the understanding that “the church sends missionaries elsewhere—into other places,” “missional” describes “churches . . . sent by God to exhibit and proclaim the gospel in places where they live.”<sup>6</sup> The ministries the Dialog Partners describe very much include the local. In addition to the ministries already described, for instance, one Dialog Partner is the organizer and implementer of a monthly senior citizen lunch program and also runs a local non-profit that helps homeless people make the transition to their first independent living situations by providing them with free home furnishings.

Another important facet of the missional church is that it is not another strategy devised by experts to “grow,” “revive,” or “re-develop” the church. Its authors repeatedly make the point that the missional church is theologically and scripturally grounded, and I read the literature as arguing that the missional church was the form the church was meant to take from its founding and through its entire history, with “Christendom”

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 68.

<sup>6</sup> Mark Lau Branson and Juan F. Martinez, *Churches, Cultures & Leadership: A Practical Theology of Congregations and Ethnicities* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2011), 76. It should be noted here that there has been a call to interrogate the whole idea of the *missio Dei* from an Asian American theological perspective, though I understand the target of criticism to be missiology understood as “missionary” (i.e., internationally focused) as opposed to “missional” (i.e., locally focused). See J. Jayakiran Sebastian, “Should the Pedal Point Always Bring Dissonance Back into Harmony? Interrogating *missio Dei* from an Asian American Perspective,” *Journal of Race, Ethnicity, and Religion* 3, no. 2.13 (January 2012):1-19.

responsible for various misguided digressions.<sup>7</sup> Though they were not coached to use the language of the missional church, more than one Dialog Partner hinted that their call to ministry was equally basic to the church's life and their own lives of faith:

[My motivation to engage in ministry is] desire for all to be welcomed and included, for people to know God and God's grace and goodness, for our church to move toward more inclusiveness, diversity and awareness of other.

*Charles*

Scripture calls us to do the work, to offer our substance. The needs are great; we all have so much. . . Our response is required of us. The sermon on the mount comes to mind. I'm sure you know the passages; as an Episcopalian I can't quote chapter and verse....

*William*

One theological tenet repeated through the literature is that the "mission" being spoken of is not the mission of "the church" or of any individual parish church, but is in fact God's mission, the *missio Dei*, which the church carries out in ways suited to its particular gifts.

*Missional Church*—Self-understanding: Exists as a community created by the Spirit that is missionary by nature in being called and sent to participate in God's mission in the world. . . . The missional church conversation brings together two streams of understanding God's work in the world. First, God has a mission within all of creation—the *missio Dei*. Second, God brought redemption to bear on all of life within creation through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ—the kingdom of God. This redemptive work of God through Christ is best understood in terms of its announcement and inauguration by Jesus as the presence of the kingdom of God in the world.<sup>8</sup>

Thus, those who write about the missional church are making much greater claims for their views than simply another program or formula for church renewal. They call the church universal to rethink its ecclesiology back to its scriptural and historical roots.

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<sup>7</sup> Dwight Zscheile's view of the digression of the Christendom era (since his subject is the Episcopal Church) is seen through that church's "legacy of establishment." See Zscheile, *People of the Way*, 17-31.

<sup>8</sup> Craig Van Gelder, *The Ministry of the Missional Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2007), 84-85.

Even though a succinct definition is elusive, four themes seem to appear “fairly regularly” in the voluminous North American literature over the past decade:

1. *God is a missionary God who sends the church into the world.* This understanding shifts the agency of mission from the church to God. It is God’s mission that has a church rather than a church that has a mission.
2. *God’s mission in the world is related to the reign (kingdom) of God.* This understanding makes the work of God in the world larger than the mission of the church, although the church is directly involved in the reign (kingdom) of God.
3. *The missional church is an incarnational (versus an attractional) ministry sent to engage a postmodern, post-Christendom, globalized context.* This understanding requires every congregation to take on a missionary posture for engaging its local context, with this missionary engagement shaping everything a congregation does.
4. *The internal life of the missional church focuses on every believer living as a disciple engaging in mission.* This understanding makes every member a minister, with the spiritual growth of every disciple becoming the primary focus as the body is built up to participate more fully in God’s mission in the world.<sup>9</sup>

Two points need to be highlighted here in relation to this thesis. The first is that even though the impact of the missional church must be local, whatever else it is, it still takes place in a “postmodern, post-Christendom, *globalized* context.” In other words, a program to assist one’s immediate neighbors is an obvious application of missional thinking to church life, but the wider globalized context must be attended to, as well. One can supply food, clothing, and companionship to the women’s shelter two miles away, *and* one can pay attention to, and do something about, lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgendered people being institutionally oppressed in Nigeria, Uganda, and Russia.<sup>10</sup> A Chinese American Episcopalian can devote herself to church governance and local mission, *and* consider what God calls her to think and do about the imperative for peace and

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<sup>9</sup> Craig Van Gelder and Dwight J. Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective: Mapping Trends and Shaping the Conversation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2011), 4.

<sup>10</sup> For an example of a ministry to the LGBT community in nations where it is actively oppressed, see the LGBT Asylum Support Task force, a ministry of the Hadwen Park Church (United Church of Christ) in Worcester, Massachusetts: [www.lgbtasylum.org](http://www.lgbtasylum.org).

reconciliation in the context of the economic and political relations between the United States and China on the world stage.

The second point to be highlighted is the emphasis on the “reign (kingdom) of God.” As we shall see, a third term used for the same idea is Verna Dozier’s “dream of God.” In understanding a congregation’s life as missional, we cannot delude ourselves that we are doing more than a little bit to make visible the kingdom of God. Whatever a congregation does to become a “missional church” will certainly be small in relation to any expansive vision of the reign/kingdom/dream of God, but somehow to persist in working to connect the smaller to the greater is an intrinsic component of our movements of faith and spiritual growth.

### *Baptismal Ministry*

I will not make the many fine distinctions that are possible between all the terms used to refer to baptismal ministry—“lay ministry,” “baptismal vocation,” “ministry of the baptized,” or Martin Luther’s phrase, “priesthood of all believers.” I will simply use the perhaps crude understanding that I repeat in my preaching: We are all—lay and ordained alike—called into ministry by virtue of our baptism. Ministry can take many forms, and may take place both within the institutional church and outside it. Verna Dozier points to this when she talks about sacred space:

I believe the sacred space is where the institutionally ordained preside. I believe it is also where mothers tend their children, teachers guide their students, doctors care for their patients, police officers patrol the streets, executives make decisions, laborers ply their trades—laity everywhere doing the work they are called to do.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Cynthia L. Shattuck and Fredrica Harris Thompsett, eds., *Confronted by God: The Essential Verna Dozier* (New York: Church Publishing, 2006), 48. This short anthology gathers writings by Dozier from a variety of sources, and the origin of the chapter containing this quotation is Verna Dozier’s *The Authority of the Laity* (Washington, DC: The Alban Institute, 1982).



L. William Countryman offers a presentation of “the priesthood of all” widely grounded in “biblical studies, church history, history of religions, theology, practical theology, and spirituality,” and explains his use of the word “priesthood” as a synonym for “minister.”<sup>12</sup> Like Dozier, he claims a universality for priesthood/ministry:

The first thing to say in our exploration of priesthood, then, is that priesthood is a fundamental and inescapable part of being human. All human beings, knowingly or not, minister as priests to one another. All of us, knowingly or not, receive priestly ministrations from one another. This is the first thing to say about priesthood because it is the most basic.<sup>13</sup>

Countryman argues that not only is it an intrinsic good to encourage laypersons to apply the word “ministry” (or “priesthood”) to their lives as Christian disciples, but that much confusion and harm has come to the church by understanding “clergy” and “laity” as completely distinct from one another. Not only the multifaceted problems of clericalism, but also clergy supply and distribution; uncertainty about the selection, discernment, education, and ordination of clergy; clergy malfeasance in sexual and financial matters; and the sense that the church is the locus of a commodity exchange between producer (clergy) and consumer (laity)—all these are implicated in the failure to understand the priesthood of all.<sup>14</sup>

Robert A. Muthiah helpfully extends the understanding of the priesthood of all believers by presenting it in the context of three aspects (or, in his usage, “institutions”) of postmodernism: globalization, individualism, and technological systems.<sup>15</sup> He is

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<sup>12</sup> L. William Countryman, *Living on the Border of the Holy: Renewing the Priesthood of All* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse, 1999), xii.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 81-136.

<sup>15</sup> Robert A. Muthiah, *The Priesthood of All Believers in the Twenty-first Century: Living Faithfully as the Whole People of God in a Postmodern Context* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2009), 87-133.

careful to “mind the gap”—“Often there is a gap between our *stated* theology and our *lived* theology.”<sup>16</sup> As we will see, the responses of the Dialog Partners will bear out this sense of gap, at least for themselves.

Of the six Dialog Partners, only one enthusiastically endorsed baptismal ministry as the rationale for his ministerial practice:

**Yes, absolutely! We are all empowered to live out our calling as Christians. As Irenaeus wrote, “The glory of God is [a person] full alive.” When one is fully connected to one’s baptismal ministry, one is fully alive and God is glorified.**

*Charles*

Others were much more reluctant to use the word “ministry” at all to describe what they do, despite the fact that the number and breadth each individual’s activities would strike anyone as the essence of Christian ministry. One response interestingly takes Dozier and Countryman’s universal claims and excludes the explicit church work: “I don’t see the work in church as ministry. I see the life I live day-to-day as ministry. And working on self-improvement as part of that ministry to be a better Christian whether I am in church or not.”<sup>17</sup> Two people cited gratitude and a sense of one’s own abundance as the motivator behind the work they do. As one of them stated:

**There is so much need in the world and as an individual it is hard to stand by and watch without trying to make a difference. I have been very fortunate to have had a good life and to enjoy that life. I enjoy trying to make a difference for those who are not as fortunate.**

**Some have said that all these works are “ministries” but I’ve never really thought of them**

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 134.

<sup>17</sup> Frances, e-mail message to author, February 13, 2014. Joerg Rieger and Kwok Pui-lan assert: “The notion of priesthood cannot be narrowly defined as someone serving in a sanctuary and performing certain religious rites. Priesthood is serving others in our daily lives so that others may experience the presence and blessings of God. Countryman continues, ‘The primary Christian priesthood, like the fundamental priesthood of all humanity, belongs to the sphere of everyday human activity. It is not divorced from the profane world; it stands in the center of it.’ We agree with Countryman that Christian priesthood takes place in our daily lives, and we want to push for a more blurred line between the holy and the profane, as described in his book.” See *Occupy Religion: Theology of the Multitude* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield), 124-25. The quotation is from Countryman, *Living on the Border of the Holy*, 66.

that way. I think in terms of giving back. When I do things I never think in terms of “I’m doing this ministry” or that I’m doing it as part of being a Christian. I think of it as doing the right thing and that if you have been fortunate then you should share. I suppose I wasn’t properly schooled in making the connections but I was schooled in the practice of giving back. This probably comes from a lack of proper church schooling, bible reading, Sunday school. I hear people speaking of the things I participate in, in terms of “ministries” and being a good Christian but I always find that awkward.

*Ellen*

Notice Ellen’s apology in not being “properly schooled in making the connections.” The fact that she feels the need to apologize for such a thing is interesting in itself, as if it might not have been the church’s failure to make the case for baptismal ministry.

The most provocative response came from Yvonne, who acknowledges having been schooled in the language of baptismal ministry. While testifying to a strong sense of call to do the work of her ministry, she yet contests the language we use:

I think the answer to this question [i.e., what motivates the person to do the ministry he/she does] is that it's not so much motivation as it is irresistible call. It's like the angels of God have called me with the siren of an irresistible song, and I cannot resist, not even when I want to resist desperately. As I imagine that others might sometimes feel, there are times when I just want to take a time out from God and God's call. The call of God is manifest in the characteristics of God shaped in me. Those characteristics are not my personality and not my cultural upbringing and not my morality shaped by parents and society. I see one of God's core characteristics, besides love, as being God's desire to call all of God's creation to God's self, so that all of Creation can be drenched in God's love. I feel that characteristic of God in myself. Even when I'm tired and feeling distant from God, I cannot seem to help myself, I cannot seem to step away from my innate desire to point others towards the grace, love, and generosity of God. I don't understand it, I can't quite articulate it, and yet, I know it.

I certainly know, understand, and can both articulate and relate to the vocabulary we use in the Episcopal Church to describe ministry, such as "baptismal covenant," "ministry of all the baptized," "priesthood of all believers," etc. But I think all that language is ultimately insider language. We as Christians know God through the lessons of scripture and our traditions. But God is a whole lot bigger than scripture or traditions. I think that's what the emergent church movement is hinting at, that we must share God in terms that extend beyond the limits of our institutional language, including the language of scripture.

*Yvonne*

Yvonne critiques the use of “insider language” to describe the ministry of the laity, and in her reference to God being “bigger than scripture or traditions” seems to echo, as I hear

it, the idea from the missional church literature that the kingdom of God is bigger than the *missio Dei* as realized by the institutional church, much less by any individual parish.

### *The Church as a Learning Community*

Developing the congregation as a learning community is a key component to its formation as a body committed to baptismal ministry, and to its developing a missional focus.

One of the key characteristics of congregations seriously engaged in baptismal ministry is the commitment to a vision of a learning community that is intentional about spiritual formation for people of all ages. . . . The ability to embrace and support gifts for ministry is linked to developing the capacity of a congregation as a learning community. A learning community is more than a Sunday school program or a Bible study or an adult forum, as worthwhile as those activities are. Identifying gifts for leadership is an educational task as well as an organizational one.<sup>18</sup>

The relation between the congregation as a learning community and promoting an ethos of baptismal vocation and ministry is also congruent with the work of Verna Dozier. Fredrica Harris Thompsett makes the case that at the core of Dozier's impassioned advocacy for the authoritative ministry of the laity was her genius as an educator.<sup>19</sup> Most importantly for Dozier, teaching and learning centered around study of the Bible, as "she emphasized that Christians must 'study' and not just 'read' the Bible to live faithfully in the world."<sup>20</sup> Dozier herself emphasized the *learning* that takes place in our encounter with Scripture.

God did not write the Scriptures; human beings wrote the Scriptures. But the faith expressed [by the Anglican collect for Bible study, assigned for Proper 28 in *The Book of Common Prayer*] is that God caused them to be written for our *learning*. I find that word exciting beyond the telling—what a word to choose! Not for our

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<sup>18</sup> Sheryl A. Kujawa-Holbrook and Fredrica Harris Thompsett, *Born of Water, Born of Spirit: Supporting the Ministry of the Baptized in Small Congregations* (Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 2010), 95-96.

<sup>19</sup> Fredrica Harris Thompsett, introduction to *Confronted by God: The Essential Verna Dozier*, ed. Cynthia L. Shattuck and Fredrica Harris Thompsett (New York: Seabury, 2006), 2-8.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

inspiration. They may inspire, but that is not the purpose as the distinguished Anglican who wrote the collect saw it. Not for our guidance. We may find guidance there, but that is not the purpose of their being written. Not for our comfort, although we may be comforted and strengthened by the sacred history.

They are written for our *learning*. There is something we need to learn, and the only place we can find the subject matter for that learning is in the Bible. We need to know the story, the story the Bible—and only the Bible—tells.<sup>21</sup>

Dozier is addressing herself to the church, the people of God, the baptized community.<sup>22</sup> Dozier's emphasis on the church as a learning community is certainly inspiring, and my experience of the church as a learning community has uncovered needs to hear not only about the Bible itself, but also about the basic nature of spirituality, the richness of spiritual traditions, and basic information about religion and religious institutions—in other words, not just the information and skills necessary to be Christian, but the practices and habits of thought that enable one to be simply religious. The following are some examples over the past decade of my personal experience of biblical and spiritual lacunae among God's people:

- A fellow seminary student who had been raised Roman Catholic knew nothing about the story of the patriarch Joseph. When, years later, I related this to a parishioner who had also grown up Roman Catholic, she said, "Can I just mention that for us there is only one Joseph in the Bible?"
- A young man recently ordained to the priesthood in this diocese had a noticeably poor performance on his General Ordination Examination in which, it was reported by someone who read some of his answers, he had taken the story of David, Bathsheba, and the killing of Uriah, as an example of God's condoning human violence.
- In a parish where I served, parishioners told me they would not be interested in "passionate spirituality," which understood to entail "waving hands and shouting 'Amen' during the sermon." I asked whether anyone had exposed them to the practices of spirituality such as centering prayer and *lectio divina* that were more compatible with Anglican tradition; they claimed no one had.
- A group Bible study on the book of Ruth revealed that not one of the five adults gathered—many of them no doubt considering themselves lifelong Christians—had read it before.

*Thomas*

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<sup>21</sup> Verna J. Dozier, *The Dream of God: A Call to Return* (Boston: Cowley, 1991), 7-8. Emphases in the original.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

In the church as a learning community, then, it can seem as if there is virtually everything to learn, and no assumptions of past experience or catechesis can be set too modestly. How does one even begin a conversation with the real-life laity about transforming our understandings of church, about rediscovering the *missio Dei*, when basic biblical and theological literacy among faithful church-goers can be so lacking?

In the literature on organizational leadership, “the learning community” as a concept was popularized in large part by Peter Senge and various groups of colleagues. In *The Fifth Discipline*, Senge is refreshingly honest about his participation in another “management fad,” and how he intended to “‘put a stake in the ground’—to establish a position concerning what was possible, a position that would become a point of reference as the fad cycle developed.”<sup>23</sup> In that initial book and in a massive follow-up compendious resource,<sup>24</sup> Senge and associates provide an overwhelming amount of material addressing the role of the learning organization (which some have later re-named “the learning community”) not just in effective leadership, but in the whole complex process of effecting change in contexts of uncertainty and unpredictability.

The fundamental model of the learning community concept is based on systems thinking, which is the fifth of the five disciplines that constitute the model. The five disciplines that form the essence of the model are (1) systems thinking, (2) personal mastery, (3) mental models, (4) building shared vision, and (5) team learning. Though learning is only part of the formal name of the last-named discipline, learning is in fact a

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<sup>23</sup> Peter M. Senge, introduction to the paperback edition of *The Fifth Discipline: The Art & Practice of the Learning Organization* (New York: Doubleday, 1990), ix.

<sup>24</sup> Peter Senge, Art Kleiner, Charlotte Roberts, et al., *The Dance of Change: The Challenges to Sustaining Momentum in Learning Organizations, A Fifth Discipline Resource* (New York: Doubleday, 1999).

basic component of each of the disciplines. Without communal learning, none of the five disciplines can be activated.

I realize I may have a cultural bias in favoring the concept of the church as a learning community. On the one hand, seeing an organization as a learning community, instead of a hierarchy of authority, control, and compliance, seems to me reasonable on its face. This perspective on leadership seems likely to open up possibilities of freedom, agency, exploration, and creativity—both for the leader and for the congregation.

And I suspect that my Asian cultural background, shallow as it is, may also be partly responsible for my attraction to the idea of learning organizations and learning communities—especially as a mental model of organizational transformation. One stereotype of Asian culture is that it prioritizes education and learning. Regardless of socioeconomic class, the stereotype goes, Asian children are urged to do well in school. If the value of learning and education, for me and for many Asian Americans, is in fact a culturally learned value, then it should be no surprise that I would be attracted to the idea of the learning community.

Several writers have tried to apply Senge's work—especially the work based on systems-theory—to leadership and the life of congregations. For instance, *The Learning Congregation: A New Vision of Leadership*, by Thomas R. Hawkins, succinctly and clearly presents the case for shared vision.

Creating a shared vision is one way congregations can spark a creative synergy between different levels of learning. . . . Vision inspires people, groups, and organizations to learn. Without a vision pulling them into the future, people have little incentive to learn. A shared vision lures people to become more than they already are. It generates the energy that fuels learning. Senge proposes that “shared vision is vital for the learning organization because it provides the focus and energy for learning.

While adaptive learning is possible without vision, generative learning occurs only when people are striving to accomplish something that matters deeply to them.”<sup>25</sup>

Vision, I thought, should be the one problem a church would not have. Surely we would not need multiple surveys, focus groups, market analyses, team-building exercises, small-group reflections adding up to large-group consensus—all to discover a “vision” as yet unarticulated. Surely, as people whose faith is informed by the Hebrew Scriptures and the Christian Testament, our vision has been made clear from our earliest days. The convening of a Diocesan Mission and Planning Commission in the diocese where I currently serve gave rise to these thoughts:

**It struck me as odd when a diocesan body tasked with discerning a mission and ministry for the diocese posed it as such a quandary. “What is a diocese for?” they asked. How is that question different from asking what a church is for, I wondered to myself. And what is the church but simply the people of God sent into the world to carry out God’s mission? And do we not have multiple biblical formulations of what that should be? Amos 5:24, Micah 6:8, the Beatitudes, Matthew 25—I thought: just pick one! I finally began to say this out loud in diocesan gatherings, apparently without much of a hearing. Sure enough, the final document out of the Diocesan Mission and Planning Commission, presented as if it were a stunning new discovery, was a warmed-over discourse on the Baptismal Covenant.**

*Thomas*

I articulated my understanding of the church as a learning community in an Annual Report, soon after the start of my ministry at the church where I currently serve:

A church is quintessentially a learning organization, as many clergy readers of Senge’s book have found to his surprise. We are in a continual learning process. We learn about God and our relationship to God. We learn how to be kind, gentle, and Christ-like with each other. We learn how to pass on our faith to our children, and how to help them understand that faith is a way of living the full and joyful life of God’s children on earth. We learn about the beauties of our worship traditions and about how to share them with others.

We also learn how to make our way in an uncertain world, how to see our faith as continually relevant in rapidly changing circumstances. We learn how to be church in this broken world—a puzzle that is never complete, never solved, but is nothing less

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<sup>25</sup> Thomas R. Hawkins, *The Learning Congregation: A New Vision of Leadership* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 52.



than an unfolding mystery, an ongoing journey that takes us (we hope!) in the general direction of God's kingdom. We never quite arrive; we are always learning.

It is this sense of church as a learning organization that has led me to call people to come learn with me—not just in Adult Forum where we learn how our faith is enfolded in our daily lives—but also in some practical ways that bear on our survival and flourishing as this particular church. . . .

Isaiah says, “Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD,” to which I add, “Come now, and let us learn together.” Let us continue together on this wondrous journey, discovering along the path better and better ways to be God's people.

I asked the Dialog Partners to think about the church as a learning community, without explaining to them how the literature defines the concept, but letting them decide for themselves intuitively what it meant. Their responses were instructively all over the map, from the positive to the insightfully and provocatively negative.

Some reflected a sense of learning such as I articulated in the Annual Report passage just quoted, one of them citing as an example of learning, “how might we engage in the issues of this world in dialogue and process even though it is not easy. This has helped me in my own relationship with God as it deepens my questions and my understandings of God and faith.”<sup>26</sup> Another more generally cited the learning that takes place in “the group worship, the music, the lessons, the preaching, the classes offered and taken, the fellow parishioners [who] all help us on our way by involving us and allowing us a nurturing environment to continue onward.”<sup>27</sup> One Dialog Partner spoke about how she learned from the example of other parishioners:

**Some of the parishioners either work or volunteer in non-profit organizations such as [a city-wide feeding ministry], homeless shelters, etc. They don't preach to me, but show me by examples what it is like to do Christ's work and live in his image. My church community teaches me that there is so much good in people and in the world, thus I strive to be like them.**

*Nora*

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<sup>26</sup> Charles, e-mail message to author, February 12, 2014.

<sup>27</sup> William, e-mail message to author, February 10, 2014.

In marked contrast to the relatively positive views of learning in the church, Ellen pointed to the obstacles that dysfunctional congregational dynamics can present:

I have found that churches are not a good place for me as a learning community. People being people make pretty lousy Christians. They say one thing and turn right around and do some pretty awful things. Perhaps that is what I am learning – that we are all struggling Christians and it's hard to be a Christian. I tend not to get involved with the broader community. When I left my last church I decided not to get as involved in my new church in order to lessen the “familiarity breeds contempt” syndrome and it's working. I don't feel any more or less connected to God but I feel better about my fellow parishioners as I don't learn what they “really” are thinking.

*Ellen*

Ellen's response may point to the need for a certain baseline of communal health to be in place before the parish church can be an effective learning community. It should be noted that when she says “I tend not to get involved with the broader community,” she means the church community. She has a leadership role in several important ministries that clearly serve the broader—and yet still local—community outside the church.

Yvonne's critique of the possibilities of the church as a learning community was the most far-reaching and theologically grounded:

For me, in order for the church to be a learning community, the institutional church would have to let go of its ethos of orders and hierarchy and its rigid reliance on canonical scripture and institutional tradition. I'm not at all sure that the institutional church has the capacity to do this. It may be that the institutional church has to die to itself in order to rise up and live in the light of God. Easy to say, but oh, so difficult to live into. . . .

My sense is that the institutional church does not truly believe or sincerely embrace its theological teachings about the ultimate power of loss and letting go. In the church we talk about coming to the foot of the cross. My contention is that the foot of the cross is too safe a place to be, as we sit there on the ground, eyes gazing up at the crucified Jesus, weeping and wailing, feeling sorry for ourselves and our great loss of our Lord. My contention is that we are actually called into the center of the cross, to join our Lord in the ultimate loss of everything we hold dear in this realm, namely, our very lives, before we can *cross over, cross through*, to the risen life where our fellow human beings, like Mary Magdalene, will not recognize us, where maybe we ourselves do not recognize us, because we have become transformed into new creatures of another realm.

So, I guess for me, the question is, how do we become learning communities that learn to embrace loss without allowing our egos, our yearning to hang onto what we've known and owned, to own and define us. I think that the way we frame, the way we posit, life has something to do with our capacity or lack thereof. For example, does it matter that we think of the cup as half empty or half full? Thinking of the cup as half empty focuses our thought on trying to fill up the cup and not losing anything more from the cup. Thinking of the cup as half full focuses on being thankful for

what we have and also the same not losing anything more from the cup. Neither way of thinking of the cup leads us to ponder and reflect upon the meaning, the act, and the costs of ownership and what a willingness to embrace loss might mean in terms of adding to life. I'm sure there are philosophers and theologians who much more elegantly talk about this.

I would welcome the church as learning communities in the sense of encouraging cadres in the church, perhaps organized by interest and affinity groups (such as ethnic ministries, women's ministries, etc.), to gather for conversation around theological formation topics and justice and peace topics. I think that organizing around theological formation and justice and peace topics has the potential to grow communities that are less structure bound and more free-flowing in thought and relationships. I am unconvinced that the traditional way we organize ourselves into purpose-driven groups leads to organic growth of learning communities. I think that purpose-driven groups lead to problem-solving results, which justify budgets and expenditures of time, but they do not lead to the growth of visionary leaders or coalitions of dream-sharing, vision-sharing people.

*Yvonne*

Yvonne—who earlier characterized the terminology of “baptismal ministry,” and “priesthood of all believers” as “insider language”—has a personal understanding of the church, centered on the cross of Christ, which nevertheless resonates with Countryman’s anti-hierarchical, anti-clericalist description of not just the priesthood of all believers, but the priesthood of “all.” Indeed, Yvonne seems to go radically beyond Countryman and Dozier in proposing not just a dismantling of clericalism and hierarchy, but also of the church’s “rigid reliance on canonical scripture and institutional tradition.”

Both Yvonne and Countryman let us know that the church both of them envision is far from being realized. While it may be “already” in many places,<sup>28</sup> it is most certainly “not yet” in many others. Not only has the vision of a kingdom-centered, missional church not been widely realized in the Episcopal Church, one must wonder whether the vision itself has even been widely enough disseminated. In the next section, I will

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<sup>28</sup> See the examples in Kujawa-Holbrook and Thompsett, *Born of Water, Born of Spirit*, and Sheryl A. Kujawa-Holbrook, ed. *Hope and Action: Abundant Small Congregations—A Small Church Growth Strategies Handbook*. Prepared for the General Convention 2012 by the Office for Congregational Vitality, Episcopal Church Center, Bob Honeychurch, Missioner (New York: The Episcopal Church, 2012), [http://archive.episcopalchurch.org/documents/Hope\\_and\\_Action.pdf](http://archive.episcopalchurch.org/documents/Hope_and_Action.pdf).

describe some of the clouds that obscure our view of the vision necessary to empower and re-invigorate the church.

*The Dream of God: What Needs to Be Learned?*

In my preaching, speaking, and writing to the congregation, I often refer to God's dream, the dream of God, the world that God dreams for us. At one point I may have fooled myself into thinking I came up with that phrase myself. But fortunately I came across Verna Dozier's *The Dream of God* on my bookshelf and realized I must have read it for a seminary course. After re-reading the book, I realized that it pretty much sums up my entire understanding about church. To clarify my grappling with the issues of the learning community, the missional church, and baptismal vocation it is necessary to articulate the ends we hope to achieve with our learning, the hoped-for result of reconceiving ourselves as a missional church, the direction of the journey to which our baptismal vocation has called us. In the life of the church, these ends, these results, and the direction we seek can be summed up in the phrase, "the dream of God."

The dream of God is the kingdom of God, as I understand it in Verna Dozier's writing. My first challenge in preaching and teaching was to tackle what I knew people were hearing in the phrases "the kingdom of God," or "the kingdom of heaven." Dozier warns clearly and succinctly of this misconception: "Now when most people hear about the kingdom of God, they start thinking about pearly gates and streets of gold and some of us getting there and some of us not."<sup>29</sup> No matter how many times I have explained, and pointed to the biblical text to support the explanation, I still sense that for most

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<sup>29</sup> Dozier, *The Dream of God*, 125.

laypeople the kingdom of heaven means the pearly gates idea of heaven, that place where baptized Christians, or people who acknowledge Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, or simply good people (and *only* such people!) will go after they die. The idea that in Jesus Christ God declared the kingdom of heaven as something to be realized in this time and place, in the world as we know it, has been a tough concept to convey.

Dozier makes it very clear that the institutional church is as often the problem as it is the answer, that the institutional church post-Constantine as often as not obscures and distracts from the dream of God. She tells us “that the church, in whatever form it appears institutionally, rejects the dream of God. The paradox is that within that institution the dream is kept.”<sup>30</sup> Though Dialog Partner Yvonne has not read Dozier, her critique of the institutional church’s failure to be a learning community resembles Dozier’s observation.

Several books on baptismal vocation and on church leadership bemoan the sense that many have of church as a provider of services; in this light, “stewardship,” or the collection of pledged and unpledged offerings, are the fees paid for such services. Blame is implicitly lodged against the pathologically consumerist society in which the twenty-first-century American church finds itself.<sup>31</sup> I would argue—and I suspect that Dozier might agree—that the Church did not have to wait until late twentieth-century Western

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 120.

<sup>31</sup> See, for example, Countryman, *Living on the Border of the Holy*, 100-101; Muthiah, *The Priesthood of All Believers in the Twenty-First Century*, 91-103, where he names the creation and increasing of consumer demand as a feature of globalization; and Zscheile, *People of the Way*, where he challenges the paradigm of “targeted marketing efforts, programs designed to entice spiritual consumers to participate in church” (30) and recounts the Episcopal Church’s twentieth-century embrace of the corporate bureaucratic model, where “clergy were understood to function like interchangeable parts within the denominational machine, capable of ministering effectively in any context to which they might be sent. . . . The growth of new suburban churches in the postwar period proceeded in a franchise model” (114). See also Rieger and Kwok, *Occupy Religion*, 115, where they make the point that the corporatization of the church was well under way in the Middle Ages.

capitalism for consumerism to contaminate the spiritual health of institution and participants. The entire effort, taking place over a much longer stretch of Christian history, to frankly monetize the process of salvation—most egregiously with the practices of indulgences against which Luther protested—suggests that the institutional church has been at least in part to blame for this particular stabbing in this particular foot. I would also argue that continuing to allow the misconception of the kingdom of God as a residential reward in the afterlife for a virtuous life lived in the present feeds into the consumerist view of church.

We should not be surprised, then, if the entire array of activities that a church offers comes to be commodified—from the style of music to the style of preaching, from the worship times to the opportunities for community ministry, from the Christian formation program to Bible studies on days other than Sundays. Each “ministry” the church provides is confused with a branded product line. It should not surprise us that a “customer” might take his presence and pledge to a competing franchise if the sermons do not please, or the liturgy does not register at the desired meter point between low and high, or the music grates. Should we wonder that people both inside and outside the church see it as a purveyor of goods and services—with those inside demanding value for money and those outside deciding that this is a product category they can forgo? It is all the more remarkable, then, that the Dialog Partners—who by and large consider themselves comfortably middle-class—have found reasons to choose the church and their ministries as ways of spending their time and treasure, over the other choices available.

The consumerist attitude towards the church may simply be another iteration of how the post-Constantinian church has spent fifteen hundred years in unholy alliance with its societal context. In her description of the “third fall” of the people of God,<sup>32</sup> Dozier points out how, by becoming an entrenched institution, the Church has too often imitated the habits and the corruptions of other structures of power, rather than, as Jesus repeatedly taught us, applying the power of weakness and humility to overturning those oppressive structures of power. She directs our attention to the ways in which we focus our attention on the institution, on keeping it alive, in coming up with ways to make it successful—in the world’s idea of what success is—rather than as a place where we answer our call to ministry. Recall Yvonne’s contention “that we are actually called into the center of the cross, to join our Lord in the ultimate loss of everything we hold dear in this realm, namely, our very lives, before we can *cross over*, *cross through*, to the risen life.” And Dozier tells us that

the call to ministry is the call to be a citizen of the kingdom of God in a new way, the daring, free, accepting, compassionate way Jesus modeled. It means being bound by no yesterday, fearing no tomorrow, drawing no lines between friend and foe, the acceptable ones and the outcasts. Ministry is commitment to the dream of God.

The world is not as God would have it be. The kingdoms of this world are not yet the kingdom of God, but they can become it. They are not yet the realm where God’s sovereignty is acknowledged and lived out, but they can become it.<sup>33</sup>

Dozier says she thinks “we have lost the capacity to dream great dreams.”<sup>34</sup> If this is a primary failure of the church, then the term “church,” must include both clergy and laity: we both share the blame. We need to dream great dreams, global dreams; we need

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<sup>32</sup> Dozier, *The Dream of God*, 5, 72-84.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 139.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 139.

to imagine a purpose and nature of the Church commensurate to the divine gifts of the Incarnation, Crucifixion, and Resurrection.

As I preached on February 10, 2013, inspired by my reading of Dozier:

If we are not hearing and envisioning the great language and the great scenes of our sacred Scripture—the thunderous poetry of the prophets, the continuous calling by a loving God to God’s people, the Transfiguration, the Crucifixion, the Resurrection and Ascension—if we cannot hear and see all this as pointing to some great dream for the world, as reflecting somehow the great work that God has done among us and continues to do among us, then perhaps Dozier is correct: we are no longer able to dream great dreams.

The dream of God: it cannot be caged in a building; it cannot be chained up in an institution; it cannot be relegated to one day of the week. The dream of God, the kingdom of God, calls us to a way of life, a way of being in the world. It is ministry; it is mission; it is peace; it is glory; it is love.

Without referring to Dozier, Roxburgh and Doren also discuss God’s dream for society in describing the missional church.<sup>35</sup> They emphasize the need for the church to be a “contrast society,” shaped by a “contrast story,” and engaging in “contrast practices.” A precondition to fulfill their vision, however, must be to bring a congregation to the place where they can accept the idea of being and behaving “in contrast to” the larger society. And yet, as Dozier and many others have pointed out, the Constantinian church, whose 1500-year tail wind apparently has yet to exhaust itself, seeks above all to align church and society, not put them in contrast—much less in open conflict.

In writing about the missional church, Roxburgh and Doren’s sense of God’s dream for the world is consonant with Dozier’s. They write, “God’s dream for the world is about the redemption of all creation, not just individuals getting into heaven; it is about the restoration of life as God intended it to be; it is about realigning life around God and

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<sup>35</sup> Roxburgh and Boren, *Introducing the Missional Church*, 101-11.



God's ways."<sup>36</sup> The only quibble I would raise with this formulation is the use of the word "restore." I believe that our theological statements, to be credible, need to connect as reasonably as possible with reality as actually experienced and understood by people as we find them today. We cannot explicate the creation stories of Genesis as myths—no matter how poetic, no matter how loaded with ancient wisdom—and then speak of a world of Edenic perfection that once existed and that we now commit ourselves to "restore." I cannot envision how to "restore" a state of justice between rich and poor that has never been fully realized; I cannot envision how to "restore" a state of reconciliation between Chinese- and Euro-Americans that has yet to come into being; I cannot envision how to "restore" a global amity between China and the United States that never was.

The usefulness of the phrase "the dream of God" for me is the idea that our divine partner in earthly life aspires to a world and way of being that has never existed in its fullness, but has only been glimpsed from time to time in our lived history—hence the need to persist in dreaming. Following Dozier in taking our understanding of God from the entire story of Scripture, I see a danger in locating God's dream in any particular imagined or reconstructed world from Scripture—just as I argued in the first chapter of this thesis that we need to surrender our notions that a promised land will relieve our state of unease in diaspora. In detecting through Scripture what God's dream may look like, we must all remember that we are interpreting as through a glass darkly, carefully aware of our mental models and our words. As Dozier reminds us about the church,

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 101-102. In his proposal to interrogate the *missio Dei* from an Asian American perspective, Sebastian wonders how we are to know "God's ways," or to ensure that we are not substituting our vision for God's. See Sebastian, "Should the Pedal Point," 10-11. Obviously, human discernment of God's will and God's vision will be imprecise, imperfect, and often misguided. That does not mean we are not called make the attempt.

The institution has preserved the biblical record in all its ambiguity—all the sacred writings, all the ancient struggles, all the history down to this present hour. We can study it and see for ourselves that at no time was the vision clear and unambiguous. From the time of its birth as a people, Israel *interpreted* its history and then transmitted it in oral and written tradition as an expression of life in fellowship with God, in response to God's call, God's promises, and God's commandments. The interpretation of history as the expression of a divine-human relationship runs throughout Scripture. . . . Faith always includes the possibility it could at any given moment be wrong, and that is why it requires courage.<sup>37</sup>

My final objection to using the language of restoration or recovery, to maintaining the myth of an Edenic perfection in the past, is that there were only two people in Eden. It requires a difficult and counter-intuitive move of the imagination to go from a quarrelsome couple to the idea of community. Perhaps the most insistent rhyme among the three strands of the conversation about the nature and purpose of the church—the missional church, baptismal vocation and ministry, and the church as a learning organization—is that the church is not about the individual, or even about couples, but is rather about the community: the community gathered to worship and to be sent out on mission, and the community (world) that is the field of mission. Our solid church buildings have unfortunately created all-too-palpable walls between these two communities that in reality are one and the same community, the mission field where we are all required to ask who God is, who God calls us to be, and what God calls us to do.

The writers proposing a missional sense of church use a language of movement; they remind us of the biblical language of the people of God being sent, as opposed to being called in. Even as the proponents of the missional church recognize that we have imprisoned ourselves in a system of fixed buildings, they also invite us to contemplate the movement of sending out. Re-orienting congregations away from inwardness and

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<sup>37</sup> Dozier, *The Dream of God*, 146-47.

enclosed communities toward an outward, missional focus will, again, require learning and developing a culture of learning. Recommended programs of learning are available to congregations to show how this can be done in real life, in every setting.<sup>38</sup>

Among the other places we are being sent, as the people of God, is into the future, not back to the past. That has been another source of the church's undoing: its incorrigible tendency to look backward, holding fast to what was, ignoring the fact that the kingdom of God does not lie in the past and never did, failing to see that the past is littered with the sins and evils of God's people.

"The world is not as God would have it be," Verna Dozier reminds us. "The kingdoms of this world are not yet the kingdom of God, but they can become it. They are not yet the realm where God's sovereignty is acknowledged and lived out, but they can become it." Belief in a pre-historical garden of perfection, or even a tinted memory of thriving congregations encased in stained glass, distracts us from the task at hand, from the journey to be begun, from the pursuit of the dream to which we are called.

The Israelites made a faith statement. God was for them, and in the power of that faith a people was born, a covenant was established, and we are their spiritual descendants. We, too, look at the world and ask what God is doing, which is another way of asking the question of meaning, the theological question.<sup>39</sup>

Perhaps the vital component of leadership for both lay and ordained leaders alike (but especially for the latter) is the ability to forge community. For it is in community that we learn; it is in community that we fulfill our baptismal vocation; it is together in community that we embark on God's mission and seek to make real the dream of God.

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<sup>38</sup> See the list of resources in Kujawa-Holbrook, ed., *Hope and Action*, Section III (pages unnumbered).

<sup>39</sup> Dozier, *The Dream of God*, 18.

Insofar as I have come to know the Dialog Partners, I believe they have—unwittingly or not—participated in some way in God’s dream; in their church contexts they have put in real work to build and sustain community. Either in our own lives, or brought to a “new world” by our parents or grandparents, we know we have physically departed from the past and embarked upon a voyage into the future, and that the communities we join are not the communities bequeathed to us by our generational histories. In voyaging across the hyphen between “Chinese” and “American,” in stepping through the liminal threshold to engage in their several and varied ministries, and most of all in daring to journey in faith within the Episcopal Church, the Dialog Partners have each worked hard to add to the sum of the world’s joy, and to ameliorate the world’s accumulated pain and brokenness. I am privileged to be on the journey with them.

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